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Journal des débats (Hansard)

Jeudi 30 mai 2013



Speaker
Honourable Dave Levac

Clerk
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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Thursday 30 May 2013

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Jeudi 30 mai 2013

The House met at 0900.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Good morning.
Please join me in prayer.

Prayers.

WEARING OF UNIFORM

Mr. Paul Miller: Point of order.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): A point of order from the member from Hamilton East-Stoney Creek.

Mr. Paul Miller: I seek unanimous consent to wear in the House later today a full War of 1812 regimental officer's uniform.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Mr. Miller has requested unanimous consent to wear his full regalia this afternoon for statements. Do we agree? Agreed.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

ORDER OF BUSINESS

Resuming the debate adjourned on May 29, 2013, on the amendment to the amendment to the motion to apply a timetable to certain business of the House.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Further debate? The member from Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock.

Ms. Laurie Scott: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's one of those very long riding names.

I'm pleased to have the opportunity to speak today on the Liberal-NDP programming motion regarding the scheduling of the budget bill and the government's handouts to the NDP, which is the price of their support.

Since the Liberal-NDP alliance didn't consult with the PC Party regarding this programming motion—and I know the member from Simcoe-Grey was very eloquent the other day in saying what had happened historically, because he is House leader—I can only assume that this is a continuation of the government's refusal to consider any ideas or proposals from the official opposition which might differ from their own view of the world. Of course, we've heard that throughout the debates in the Legislature, but nevertheless we have the right to bring forward those ideas. I guess the member from Simcoe-Grey was saying to the House leader from the Liberals, "Pick up the phone and give me a call."

Anyway, we've seen this pattern develop with the McGuinty-Wynne government. A few months ago we listened to the, I say, Kumbaya, feel-good throne speech that contained lots of idealistic rhetoric—little substance

that is going to back it up. The budget contains much of the same, which is partially the thrust of the debate here today.

The finance minister also delivered one of those touchy-feely budget speeches that really did nothing to address the problems that are facing Ontarians, which I hear about every day in the riding of Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock.

For a bigger picture, I think we have to say our economy has weakened under the Liberals. They have called their budget plan "a prosperous and fair Ontario." We on this side of the Legislature would say that you can't have the second, which would be fairness, without the first, which is prosperity, according to their title. It's ironic, then, that over the last 10 years this government has taken Ontario further and further away from prosperity.

Interjection.

Ms. Laurie Scott: I know it's early in the morning, but I'm going to give you some numbers, if you want to follow along. It's replayed later in the day for those who want to see us in the Legislature in the reruns, which we hope some people do watch.

Let's look at some of the numbers. Ontario's unemployment rate is 7.7%; in Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock, it's higher than that. That number is hard to wrap your head around, so I can put it another way. This morning, 600,000 men and women woke up with no jobs to go to—600,000 of our friends, neighbours, family members. They want a job. They want to be productive members of society and contributors to the economy. They're denied that opportunity. Our world-class manufacturing sector, one of the engines powering our economy forward, it once was, has shed 300,000 jobs alone under this Liberal leadership.

Underlying these dismal statistics are some worrying trends that the government should have been addressing. Let's talk about productivity. Ontarians have been losing ground in comparison with our neighbours to the south, making us less competitive for attracting businesses and creating jobs. Along with our lagging productivity, our labour costs have soared.

The end result of those two things together is a pretty bleak economy. It's projected to grow a mere 1.5% this year, our third consecutive decline year over year and trailing the US. This has all added up to not only those 600,000 people who don't have a job this morning, but we've become the have-not province of this Confederation. People are—understandably—asking why.

Well, there are many reasons, and I'll go through some that I can get to in my time allotted.

Government spending: A significant part of the blame of our province's current condition can be pinned on some deliberate choices—bad policy decisions, I say—made by this government over the past decade. My colleague from Leeds-Grenville, in his address, put it: You can't spend your way to prosperity. We are going to see an increase in our deficit this year. They are still spending, Mr. Speaker. This is largely due to something the Liberals are very good at: their addiction to tax increases and their addiction to spending. According to the Fraser Institute study, the Liberals plan to increase program spending by 3% this year, in 2013-14, but in last year's budget they promised to hold spending growth to 1.1% for 2013-14. The math is not adding up. As I said, I know it's early in the morning, but there's a lot of math here, and it's all about the math.

The Liberals have basically tripled the growth in 2013-14 spending from last year's plan to the one they put forward in front of us this year. That fact should make Ontarians pretty skeptical when the government talks about its plans to eventually balance the budget. Can we believe that? Well, the math—as I said, it's all about the math—is pretty hard to believe.

A balanced budget will only be possible if we put the brakes on growth in government spending going forward. I don't think we can expect anything you could call restraint from a government that clearly can't say no. The spending is up; I know they increased their spending, but I think it's up 75% or 80% since they took office. In 10 years, government spending is up that much. It's unsustainable, and it's affecting the way of life in the province of Ontario for the people.

Because of these increases in program spending planned for this year, we're going to see the deficit grow, skyrocket back up to nearly \$12 billion. Okay, that wasn't the plan, and I don't see how that helps balance the books by the 2017-18 year that they project.

I can talk about public sector wages. The biggest share of Ontario's government program spending goes to public sector labour costs. So naturally, you'd think that if the government was sincere in wanting to achieve fiscal balance, this is the first place they'd look for savings. But I go back to the throne speech and the appointment of cabinet: They actually increased the size of the cabinet by 25%. I think that gives you a clue to the lack of enthusiasm this government has for being frugal.

We in the Progressive Conservative caucus have called for a two-year across-the-board broader public sector legislative wage freeze, which will save \$2 billion each year and begin the process of controlling government spending. Look, ladies and gentlemen, we have all got to take our share in shouldering this debt and deficit that we have in the province. The public sector also has to be part of that. A wage freeze for two years I don't think is too much to ask at all. But instead of taking action, the government is happy to do nothing, just let that debt and deficit grow.

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As just one example, they've made no attempt to fix our broken arbitration system, which is impacting the

province and bankrupting municipalities. You hear it constantly from municipalities, and they're talking to the Liberals as well as talking to the Progressive Conservatives.

Another study said that public sector compensation now exceeds that of the private sector by 14%, and if you add in pensions and health benefits that a lot of people don't enjoy, the difference can hit a breathtaking 27%. Let me tell you, the private sector out there is rebelling every day. It is just not fair. I go back again to the title of their budget: There is no way this is fair to the people—all the people—in the province of Ontario, only a select few. When we heard a couple of months ago that the sunshine list increased by 8,823 people this year, it's clearly not hard to make the big bucks working for the government, Mr. Speaker.

Add to that the cost of the government caving in to NDP demands, which themselves add up to about \$1 billion to this bill. As the saying goes: A billion here, a billion there, and pretty soon you're talking real money.

Instead of creating opportunities for our young people to learn skilled trades and stay in their communities, this government saddled the province with the College of Trades, which is at best a tax grab, at worst gross incompetence. It's not a college building that's going to help young people get into apprenticeships; it's a tax. It's not reforming the antiquated apprenticeship ratios which are out of line with the rest of Canada, and it's not standing up for the trades, which is actually where the jobs are. We have a shortage of skilled tradespeople. So it's maintaining this artificial shortage, because if they changed the system, we would hopefully work our way, over a few years, to getting our young people into the skilled trades. Instead, I hear grandparents, when I go to anniversary parties, say, "My grandchildren are going out west, and I don't blame them. There's no jobs, no opportunities here." When a government puts society in that situation, it's a disgrace.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Tell them to come north. Tell them to come to Sudbury or Timmins.

Ms. Laurie Scott: You bet. I was up in northern Ontario last summer, and they are like, "Send us your young." They need skilled tradespeople. We all need them in the province of Ontario. It would make it a better province. Our young people could stay. They would be adding to our economy, paying their taxes, increasing revenues for the government. Instead, we hear stories of skilled tradespeople from other countries coming to Canada because we can't fill the positions here. It's a shame that we are doing that to our young people.

There's a litany of costly scandals which I'll maybe get to later if the time allows me. The government has been wasting real money for a decade. If you say the government increased spending by 80% since they've taken office, I can tell you that people on the ground don't have a better way of life. They can't say their life is 75% better because the government is spending more money. They used our money for partisan purposes and not to help the people of Ontario. They used the tax-

payers' money to buy those seats from those power plants, Mr. Speaker, and that is not acceptable. We on this side of the House will not tolerate that.

So what has the Liberal spending bought us? Well, a mountain of debt. We're on track now to not only doubling our debt but tripling our debt. At about \$270 billion, we outclass all other provinces combined when it comes to owing people money. On a per capita basis, we even leave California in the dust. California is the most indebted state in the US. We've brought that up a few times, but I think it's important for people to compare that that is the situation we are in today. I'll repeat a statistic which we keep repeating because we want to educate the people about the crisis we are in in the province of Ontario: A baby born today owes \$20,000 as his or her share of debt, a number that has doubled during the Liberals' time in office. It's unconscionable. We have to do better for the province of Ontario. But \$20,000 is what a baby born today has as a debt. So we carry the highest debt in our province's history. Within the next couple of years, we're looking at \$300 billion in accumulated debt.

There has been a lot of talk about bond rating in the last few days. When spending outpaces our ability to pay, there are real consequences. Because the government has piled on more debt and has totally lacked a credible plan for paying it down, both Moody's and Standard and Poor's questioned and downgraded Ontario's rating last year.

You even heard the former finance minister from the Liberal government, Dwight Duncan, mention that a couple of days ago when he spoke to small businesses. He's pretty concerned that there's going to be a downgrading, and that means interest rates go up and we pay more on the debt and deficit.

Instead of showing investors and entrepreneurs that our province is a solid, stable place to do business, and wants to create jobs and wealth, we don't project that. We're not attracting them. They're not coming into the province of Ontario saying, "Hey, you guys are running a good ship. We want to come and invest here. You've got a great workforce." They're not saying that. We're going to be like Greece, and you don't see a lot of businesses flourishing in Greece right at the moment.

Another key point is that borrowing money is not free. Spending beyond our means actually reduces our ability to pay for things we care about. When we say that the third-largest budget item is servicing our debt—just the interest alone is \$11 billion—we could have paid for education, for health care, for helping those older parents who have disabled adults at home. We've heard many of those stories that break your heart, because there's nowhere for them to go, as their parents age, for the care they need and to be watched so they don't harm themselves.

Infrastructure that's badly needed across the province—again, \$11 billion has gone down the drain because of mismanagement and servicing our debt. It's a shame, as I said, that we cannot manage our books and invest in

things we all care about: health care, education, infrastructure, the many programs that are in jeopardy because taxpayers' dollars are servicing debt from a mismanaged government.

We can talk about the Drummond report. Economists like Don Drummond have told the government it needs to get its spending under control. The Liberal government hired Mr. Drummond to give us the economist's point of view. He came up with some pretty clear and forceful recommendations; namely, cut spending and stick to a strict debt-reduction plan. He made it clear that these aren't half measures; you had to do them all. Instead of following his prescription, the government has only attempted maybe 60%—you can guess that. That's 60% of his recommendations, when he said, "You've got to stick to this plan or you're not going to get your debt and deficit under control." They didn't take that seriously.

The longer we wait to tackle the program and this problem of overspending, the more the reality is going to hurt when we finally have to face it. As I said, we don't want to be Greece. We don't want to head down that path. That's the path we're on. I say to you: Listen up over there. You can call us partisan over here, but we are speaking for our constituents. We hear every day about their problems out there, about their concerns. But when mutual parties, such as Don Drummond, give you a report, which you asked him to give, and you don't follow those instructions, we are in trouble.

I want to talk a little bit about some issues from my riding of Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock. Health care and physiotherapy have been a hot topic of late. The budget makes this worse. A perfect example is what this budget will do to physiotherapy services for seniors across Ontario. The health minister can spin a wonderful web of how this is not going to impact physiotherapy treatments, mainly for seniors, but the facts simply don't support that.

In the 2012-13 fiscal year, over \$200 million was spent for OHIP-funded physiotherapy. The current budget reduces this funding to \$156 million, which includes \$20 million of exercise classes, which are not physiotherapy. OHIP-funded physiotherapy hasn't cost \$156 million for about three years. The physiotherapy funding in long-term care is going to be cut from \$110 million to \$58.5 million. In retirement homes, the funding will be reduced to almost nothing, and only bedridden and acute residents will qualify for a CCAC visit; the rest will be expected to leave the home in order to access services. The in-home therapy services currently provided by the designated physiotherapy centres will end, and those residents will have to access their physio through the community care access centre.

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Now, it's widely accepted among physiotherapists that CCACs have a cost per home treatment of approximately \$120, whereas the designated physiotherapy centre members have a cost of \$12.20 billed to OHIP. Those figures alone—what are you doing? The math does not make sense. The physiotherapy file is undergoing an extremely

detrimental overhaul that will hurt many of our most vulnerable citizens. To try and portray this as an improvement in services and an increase in funding is disrespectful to the people of Ontario. To think that they can sham the people when the math doesn't add up. You can talk to the physiotherapist themselves, and I believe they are coming to Queen's Park next week.

I have so many topics to talk to. Green energy, the McGuinty-Wynne government's obsessiveness with these ideologically based green energy initiatives, has created chaos. As a result of these subsidies for wind and solar projects, we've seen our energy costs spiral out of control for individuals, businesses, community organizations. I have a Legion that comes to me—and Legions have a hard time keeping the doors open, but they are foundations in our communities. I have about 16 of them throughout my riding. They are contributors to my community which I cannot praise enough. One told me their hydro bill was \$4,000 a month. How does a community organization that has a hydro bill of \$4,000 a month survive? Its days can be numbered, because that's not going to be an unusual story. It's excessive. I think most people's hydro bills—and I've said this many times: They have had to leave homes in my riding. People who are on fixed incomes just cannot handle the increase in this essential service.

When this Green Energy Act was thought up—sure, we all want green energy, but at what cost? Putting people out of their houses? Shutting down community organizations? Shutting down businesses? And we haven't got any more green energy. It has cost us at least \$1 billion more because we keep having to pay the states or the provinces to take our water power, which is green energy. So that has been a failed energy plan that we'd like you to put a moratorium on, abandon. It's not working. It's putting businesses out of business, and it's putting people out of their homes.

I can talk a lot about horse racing and ending the Slots at Racetracks Program without warning. That has created more job losses in rural Ontario. The Minister of Rural Affairs gets up the other day and says, "You can support the horse racing industry by going to the races." Well, I can tell you, at Kawartha Downs, they used to have 100 races. Now they have 20. We're supposed to be celebrating that they did a great thing for the horse racing industry. I can tell you, they're not going to be employing the same number of people they did when they actually ran 100 races throughout the year. Now they're at 20 races. It's just beyond comprehension.

Mr. Todd Smith: Disgusting.

Ms. Laurie Scott: It is disgusting. I will mention that they can have the blood on their hands for those 13,000 horses that are going to have to be euthanized because this government just decided that the Slots at Racetracks Program will end, and those people can just suffer in rural Ontario.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Questions and comments? The member for Nickel Belt.

Mme France Gélinas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Interjection.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): I'm advised we'll move into further debate.

Mme France Gélinas: Sorry, Mr. Speaker, I didn't hear what you just said.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Because of the substantive motion, it's not questions and comments; it's further debate.

Mme France Gélinas: I'm ready for further debate, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Okay.

Mme France Gélinas: Actually, before I go into my debate, I'd like to echo some of the comments that were made by the previous speaker. I too have a horse racing track in my riding. I too am seeing the devastating impact of the decision that this government has made. We used to have, I would say, 80 race days at Sudbury Downs; we are down to 20. We used to have a purse of \$50,000; we're now down to \$20,000. I will let you do the math, Mr. Speaker. The cost of feeding a horse and training a horse has not gone down. Like everything else in life, it keeps going up. But the purse money available to them has been going drastically down. So yes, some of the decisions that have been made by this government are hurting rural Ontario and are hurting northern Ontario.

Another thing that she mentioned was the changes to physiotherapy. There is a date coming: August 1. On August 1, tens of thousands of patients of physiotherapists are going to be discharged to nothing. We have no idea what's going to happen on August 2. So the comments that she brought forward are valid, except that they have nothing to do with the budget. Whether we pass the budget or not, those decisions have been made. Those decisions are happening.

What New Democrats are saying is that we have a document in front of us right now. We have a budget for the fiscal year 2013-14. Let's roll up our sleeves, and let's make this work for the people of Ontario. Let's get results for the people of Ontario that we can all be proud of.

When the House was prorogued last year, New Democrats decided to use that time to listen to the people of Ontario. We opened up the lines of communication. We were back in our ridings. We did what New Democrats always do: connect with people, listen to them, try to bring solutions, try to help out, or at least get out of the way of a good idea that is moving forward.

What did people tell us? They told us that the home care system was broken. It wasn't working for them. The wait times were too long. What did New Democrats do? We brought forward the idea that everyone in Ontario, no matter where they live, should have access to home care within five days. In some areas of the province this is going to be fairly easy to do. In other areas of the province—maybe not in Beaches-East York, but certainly in Algoma-Manitoulin and in Nickel Belt—it will require quite a bit of work. In some of the little communities that we serve, the wait times are quite long. So let's bring a measure of equity into access to home care services.

Let's make it so that everybody in Ontario, no matter where they live, will have access within five days. So we put that out there.

We continued to talk to the people of the province, and the people of the province asked us, "How could it be that mega changes have been done to the auto insurance industry, yet our bills keep going up and up and up? How could it be that we now don't have the same kind of coverage that we used to have, don't have the same kinds of benefits that we used to have? How can it be that the profits for the insurance company went skyrocketing in the billions of dollars, yet our bills for auto insurance keep going up?"

You have to realize, Mr. Speaker, that auto insurance is not like any other good or service in the province. As opposed to every other good or service, where you decide if you want to buy something or you don't, and then the forces of the market kind of work to bring prices down and competition, there's none of this in auto insurance because in auto insurance, the government tells you, "You have to buy this product." Whether you want to, whether you can afford it, whether you think it's fair, whether you can get a good price, the government tells you, "If you want to drive in Ontario, you will buy this product, and you will buy it at the price that they tell you to buy it at."

This is not working for the people of Ontario. This product's price keeps going up and up and up, and the services we get out of them were adjusted downward dramatically. What did New Democrats do with that information? They decided that the savings that had been planned through those mega changes in auto insurance were to be passed on. They were to be passed down to the consumers, to you and I, to everybody, to the nine million people in Ontario who drive. Those savings were supposed to be passed down to us, but they were not. So we put forward that idea, to roll back by 15% the cost of auto insurance because this pretty much equates the savings that the last series of regulations had brought forward.

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We continued to talk and listen, mainly listen, to the people of Ontario. Everywhere we went, like the member said before, they were telling us that the young people in their households had a hard time finding jobs, that some of them had huge debts from having gone to post-secondary education. They were well educated, they were eager, they were full of energy, they wanted to work—and they had no work.

There is work out there in our province. Hell, I come from Nickel Belt, where right now the mining industry is doing pretty well, where there are lots of jobs. But do you know what, Mr. Speaker? They want somebody with experience, so for the new tradesperson starting, for the young person out of school full of energy and eager to work and put their skills, it's hard for them to get that first job. So we put forward this idea to have a jobs creation strategy targeted at youth, targeted at those young people full of hope and energy who want to work. We put it out there.

We also put out there a way to pay for all of those ideas. The five-day home care guarantee came at a cost of \$30 million. That \$30 million did not have to come by making the deficit bigger; that \$30 million could have easily been found by, first of all, putting a cap on CEO salaries. You know, we don't ask CEOs to work for minimum wage or anything like this. We ask them to be capped at no higher than twice the salary of our Premier. Our Premier has a pretty big responsibility. She manages a budget of billions of dollars; she looks after 13 million people. So we said, "Well, CEO of health care agency, you're allowed to make twice that amount but then be capped." The money we'd have recouped would have helped to pay for the five-day home care guarantee.

We also thought that there were economies that could have been done. There have been some mega changes within—it's called CCAC, community care access centre. That's the name of an agency that looks after our home care services, and we thought that there were economies to be done there, just by changing the way—and the Association of Community Care Access Centres agreed with us. So we had put forward a balanced way. Not only did we say we want an investment of \$30 million in home care to bring equity of access to all Ontarians, but we also said how you're going to pay for it without bringing Ontario further debt, without bringing a deficit to our budget.

When it came to auto insurance, that came without any cost to the government because right now, as you know, you don't pay the government for auto insurance; you pay an insurance company, and the insurance company—so that was cost-neutral. And then, when it came to the youth employment strategy, it was coming targeted at specific jobs. So what we had brought forward was something that did not increase the deficit, did not add to the debt, but was going to deliver real results for the people of Ontario, for the people who needed it the most.

Are there other issues that need to be looked at? Absolutely. Absolutely. The previous member talked about a series of them, and I would say we would agree. But those are the ideas that we had put forward.

And there is another what I would call elephant in the room. It is a fair-sized one: \$1.3 billion. That buys you a few hours of home care when most home care workers don't make 15 bucks an hour. There's a \$1.3-billion elephant in this room, and that \$1.3 billion is a new tax credit coming to big corporations so that big corporations, when they bring their fancy friends to see—well, the Leafs are not playing any more—we all know why—but they will play again. If you bring them to a hockey game or if you go to a fancy dinner, you could expense those, and that will mean \$1.3 billion of taxes that the government of Ontario presently collects—we're not going to collect that anymore. Well, New Democrats thought that everybody should contribute their fair share. People who are able to pay for box tickets at the Leafs and fancy restaurants and all the rest of it that goes on in the corporate world that I can only dream of—if you can afford box tickets, you can probably afford to pay the

taxes on them. If you can afford the fancy dinners and the expensive wine and everything else, you can probably afford to pay your taxes way better than the people on minimum wage who have to pay HST on everything that they buy.

But no, the Liberals listened to some of our ideas. They listened on home care—kind of; they listened on a youth strategy; and they listened on the 15%. But for reasons unknown to me, they didn’t listen to the other side of what the New Democrats have put forward, the side that would make sure that we don’t go further in deficit and the side that would make sure that we don’t grow the debt.

New Democrats are socially progressive but are fiscally responsible. We fully understand that you cannot spend your way out of the mess that they have created. We fully understand that you have to have a balanced budget. We do this in our own lives; the government has to do the same. This is the plan we have come forward with.

The budget came, and the big three that we had put forward were there, front and centre, in the budget. The budget talks about home care, the budget talks about auto insurance and the budget talks about job creation for youth.

So we did what New Democrats always do. We opened up the lines of communication again, and went to Ontarians and asked them what they thought about the budget. They had told us that this was important, and it is now in the budget. Are they happy about it? We had done the same thing last year. Last year, when we went out with the budget, the comments were coming in fast and furious. They liked this. They didn’t like this. They wanted that changed.

This year the comments came in as fast and as furious, as they did last year, but people were not really talking about the budget that much. They were telling us that they don’t trust the Liberals. They were telling us that it doesn’t matter that what’s in the budget looks pretty good—they do want the home care, they do want the 15% reduction in auto insurance and they do want job creation—but they were saying that what they were promising us is not worth the paper it’s written on. They lost faith. They lost confidence.

I can’t say that I blame them. I mean, I’m the health critic. I was there when all of the dirty money from eHealth was exposed for everyone to see. It was disgusting, Mr. Speaker: \$1 billion worth of disgusting. This is what eHealth was all about. We saw well-connected Liberal insiders making money hand over fist and delivering nothing in return.

Then they saw Ornge. Ornge was just as disgusting. At Ornge, we saw people paid \$1.4 million a year. We saw a shambles of for-profit companies helping themselves to taxpayers’ money as if it was their own with a big Liberal lawyer at the front of the parade so that nobody looks at what’s behind. That shakes people’s confidence quite a bit.

Then came the gas plants. The gas plants were kind of the nail in the coffin, weren’t they? Here again, you see

decisions worth hundreds of millions of dollars made by the Liberal government for the Liberal government, not for the people of Ontario. But they stick us with the bill. They use that money as if it was their own to help their own party and they stick us, as in all of us, with the bill. So we opened up the lines of communication, talked to Ontarians, and they told us that they had lost faith. What did we do? We did what we always do. We rolled up our sleeves and asked, “How do we bring confidence back?”

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One of the two that we brought forward was a Financial Accountability Office. The Financial Accountability Officer—the name is pretty well self-explanatory—will be an officer of this Legislature, which is fancy words to mean people who report directly to all of us. They don’t report to the party in power; they report to every single MPP. They report to the House. This will be an officer of this Legislature who will look at, basically, the expenses before they are made. If you think that a promise—which is what a budget is; a budget is a promise to do something—looks like we don’t have the money to pay for this, or they’re not sure of the way that the money’s going to be funnelled will actually give us results, you call the Financial Accountability Officer and you ask him or her to have a look.

We have some of those officers right now for the Legislative Assembly. The Auditor General is a well-known one. The Auditor General comes with credibility. He knows his way around a balance sheet and a financial book, and he looks at value for money. He looks in the past. The decisions that were made, did those decisions bring us value for money? He is credible. He brings good recommendations forward, and he directs changes.

The Financial Accountability Office will be sort of a similar idea, but think of it as an Auditor General for the future. That is, you don’t do an audit of what has already been done; you look at the promises that are made for the future.

Putting something like this in place is one step to help regain that trust in the government, because democracy may not be a perfect way of government, but it is the best way that we have found so far. If people lose trust in their government, if they lose trust in our democracy, I have no idea what we’re going to change this for, because this is as good as it comes.

There’s an impetus on each and every one of us to make sure that the people of Ontario can trust their government, can trust what we represent. You can only do this when, like New Democrats, you roll up your sleeves, you look at the problem in front of you and you suggest solutions to make things better. This is what we have done.

Is this budget perfect? Absolutely not. Is this an NDP budget? Absolutely not. You still see austerity in there. I’ve had it up to here with the austerity agenda. But in the situation we have now, it was tangible results that we delivered and brought back a measure of confidence.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Mr. Todd Smith: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's good to see you this morning. It's going to be a steamy one in the Quinte area and across the province, that's for sure: 30 degrees today—long overdue.

Listen, I don't quite know how to describe what I just heard for the last 20 minutes from the member of the third party. Here we are debating the programming motion—another year, another programming motion. This one has a little less drama in it, though, than last year's programming motion, in spite of the protests that we've heard from the members of the third party, specifically the leader of the third party. She tried to make a little bit of righteous indignation at times yesterday during question period, but we know that it's a done deal, that her caucus is going to support the upcoming budget.

Yesterday, we voted on the budget. Our party was the only party to vote against the budget, for a myriad of different reasons, but the biggest reason was the reason that the member of the third party just mentioned moments ago, and that's trust. We have no trust in this government anymore. The member of the third party just said she had no trust as well, but they're rolling up their sleeves in an effort to do the best they can for the people of Ontario with a government that they don't trust. That's the problem and that's why we voted against this budget. Quite simply, the third party has given up their duties as an opposition party. They really have. They've become the excuse for keeping the Liberals in power. The whitewash to cover the multitude of scandals, which we've mentioned throughout the morning already—it's only 9:45 and we've mentioned many, many scandals that have cost us hundreds of millions and billions of dollars as a matter of fact. Every new cost that comes out of these scandals—we're about to get a couple of hundred million dollars more, I'm sure, on the Oakville scandal in August when the Auditor General reports on that issue. It's going to come with a big orange NDP seal of approval on it. We know it's going to cost up to \$1 billion. It's going to cost close to \$1 billion. For some reason, the third party forgets the fact that we can't trust this government.

The member of the third party talked moments ago about auto insurance and the fact that she can't trust the government, but they agree with the fact that the government says they're going to do what they say they're going to do and lower the cost of insurance. Well, over the last week we've seen the insurance rates go up again. It seems to me that it's the height of hypocrisy, really, to come into this chamber every day and berate the government for being a scandal-ridden—yes, Mr. Speaker?

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): I'd ask you to withdraw.

Mr. Todd Smith: I withdraw.

Interjection.

Mr. Todd Smith: I'm not exactly sure—

Interjection.

Mr. Todd Smith: Okay. I'll continue on.

It just seems to me a bit unrealistic for the party to come in here every day—it's the third party I'm speaking

of—and continue to hammer away at the government for being a scandal-ridden, elitist government and incompetent government, and then they vote after question period to keep them in power. It doesn't make sense to me. The funniest thing about this is—the member who just spoke: I have a lot of respect for her. She speaks with some degree of intelligence on many different issues. I hear her in the Legislature speaking on different issues. I hear her outside the Legislature at different events that we're at. She often speaks about the fact that we just can't trust this government anymore. So why are we continuing to support this government? Why are we continuing to believe the promises that they're making when time after time after time they break those promises over and over again?

When they were first elected in 2003, it seemed like it was minutes after they were elected that they broke the promise and brought in the health premium that was going to save our health care system. Everybody remembers when the member from Ottawa South stood in front of that camera and said, "We will not raise taxes." But then he made his case, as he often does. He talks about the fact that we need to protect our health care system, that we need to make sure that it's strong and every tax dollar that we bring in from this health premium is going to go to save our health care system. The health premium, everybody knows, was a tax, and that money doesn't go to protect our health care system; it goes into the general reserves and it gets wasted on things like a power plant scandal to save five Liberal seats in the GTA.

So now we've had the interesting debate over the auto insurance, as I mentioned. The NDP tells the government that they want a 15% reduction in auto insurance premiums. Nobody really knows where the 15% number came from. It just seems to have come out of the sky.

Interjection.

Mr. Todd Smith: There it is. Mr. O'Toole just pulled it out of the air. It does seem, though, like it was pulled out of the clear, blue sky. They asked for it, and this government, as desperate as it is to stay in power, said, "Yes, sure, we'll do the 15% off auto insurance. We'll do that. We'll do whatever you say as long as you support us so that we can stay in power." That's what the people in my riding are saying. That's what anybody who knows about the auto insurance file is saying as well. We can't do that. We can't accomplish it. We can go in there and start to make the changes, and our member from Elgin—Middlesex—London has done a fantastic job at breaking down the auto insurance file, figuring out the ways that we can find savings in that file, like the anti-fraud task force, and other areas—reducing the backlog.

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That's the thing with the auto insurance file: There's this huge backlog of 60,000 cases out there. The government has taken a few steps over the past couple of years to lower auto insurance premiums. We just haven't seen those become a reality yet, and that's because that backlog exists. The cases haven't made their way through the

system that's eventually going to result in some lower premiums for our drivers across the province.

We all want lower auto insurance premiums, no matter which party we're in. But the fact that the NDP said, "We need 15% off," and the government just said, "Yeah, we'll do it," and they trust them that this is going to happen when we know it can't really happen—it's hard to determine, Mr. Speaker, whether the third party is a bit naive or just ignorant on what's happening here with this budget and this budget motion. You know, there are some very distinguished members of the third party and the veteran member who just spoke up. They've been sitting here on the NDP benches through governments of all stripes. Surely, really, they could have seen this coming, especially what's happening on the auto insurance file.

I believe that there are a number of members of the caucus—and I know there are members of that caucus over there—who are hearing the same things from their constituents that I've been hearing from mine. And my constituents are saying loud and clear that it's time for a change in the government of Ontario, and I know there are members over there who are hearing the same thing, because I talk to their constituents as well. As the small business critic I get out there across the province—I'm in lots of other ridings—and speak to people in Brantford and I speak to people in London and I speak to people all over the province. They're frustrated with the fact that this government continues to be the government of Ontario, that the third party continues to prop them up. We know that this government can't be trusted. So I know they're hearing the same things.

I really wish that they would have released the findings of their 1-800 "Call Andrea" number. I would love to know what the responses actually were on that website. I don't know if we could get them to release those findings or not, but I think it would be interesting to actually see how many people out there that responded to the website and responded to the 1-800 number actually believe that this government deserves to remain in power, or if that was even a question that they asked.

Anyway, another budget deal has gone south, so now we're subjected to this daily ritual of the leader of the third party, who's normally quite a smart politician, standing up and protesting that she trusted the Premier. She trusted the Premier—this is what's going to happen—in this budget deal and she never expected to be double-crossed. You can almost see the theme evolving here, and we've just had the vote on the budget motion yesterday. Apparently every other time this government went back on a promise over the last 10 years, it wasn't enough evidence for the third party that this was going to happen again.

Perhaps I shouldn't place sole blame for this at the feet of the leader of the third party, because I've heard here in the halls at Queen's Park that there were a number of members of the third party who actually wanted to vote no on this budget. They actually wanted to vote no because the trust is gone. They wanted to prevent this gov-

ernment from wasting one more dollar, and apparently, from what I understand, their voices were ignored. Why were their voices ignored, Mr. Speaker, within their own caucus? I think it's an important question to ask. Why, if so many members of their caucus were willing to do their jobs as members of the opposition, did the leader of the third party decide to put a New Democratic seal of approval on the actions of this government? Well, it's because there are a lot of outside interests that are tapping them on the shoulder. People like Sid Ryan and Smokey Thomas and others that are saying that—it's almost kind of scary that these big guys—

Mr. Gilles Bisson: You know so little. You know so little.

Mr. Todd Smith: Oh, is that right? I don't think so. I don't think so. I mean, the deputy leader actually stood up in the House and read the comments over and over again in the Legislature. Time after time—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Order.

Mr. Todd Smith: I'm sure it had to be boring a hole through the hearts of those members on the third side. But big labour is actually the one that's running the third party right now. They're the ones that are giving them their marching orders whether or not they should support a budget or not. I think, frankly speaking, Mr. Speaker, it's kind of scary to the people of Ontario who are paying the tax dollars that these outside interests are actually running this place. Frankly, they've shown that it doesn't matter who they sell down the river as long as those marching orders are followed.

You can talk to the people in the harness racing industry. I know that they support the harness racing industry—at least they want to stand up for the harness racing industry; they really do, in their heart of hearts. They stand up here every day and they talk about the fact that the harness racing jobs are so important. But there's this tap on the shoulder saying, "I'm sorry, you can't support that harness racing industry. We won't allow that to happen."

There are members here who have people in northern Ontario, and they rely on the Ontario Northland transportation. They rely on that, but again, they've had this tap on their shoulder telling them that, "No, you can't stand up for your constituents."

Last year in the budget process, they sat on their hands in the third party and didn't stand up for their constituents. This year, with this budget, they're actually supporting this scandal-plagued government. It's quite sad, actually.

You had members whose ridings benefited from harness racing. The member from Nickel Belt just stood up moments ago and talked about the fact that she used to have 80 race days in her riding. The member from Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock just stood up prior to her and said that she used to have 100 in Peterborough at Kawartha Downs. We have 20 now in Nickel Belt; we have 20 now in Kawartha Downs in the Peterborough area. Unfortunately for the harness racing industry, there is only one party that stood up for them in this Legis-

lature—really stood up for them when the rubber hit the road. It was the Progressive Conservative Party of Ontario. The facts are simple. All you have to do is go back and look at the voting record. It's quite simple: There's one party that's standing up for harness racing. There's actually one party in the Legislature that's standing up for Ontario Northland. It's the PC Party. It's quite sad.

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): I would like to bring the House to order. So if I could say to the member from Timmins–James Bay: Order, please.

Carry on.

Mr. Todd Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: But I'm trying to protect him about Santa Claus.

Mr. Todd Smith: It's kind of hard to get through question period every day, Mr. Speaker. And sometimes it's hard to get through these debates, because I know the NDP really do want to stand up for their constituents; they really do. But there's this big finger tapping them on the shoulder telling them that they just can't do it.

Interjection: And it isn't Santa Claus.

Mr. Todd Smith: No, and it's not Santa Claus.

To the budget motion: Quite simply, Dwight Duncan, the former finance minister, was one of the most disastrous finance ministers that we've ever had in the province. I think we can safely say that. Under his watch, we saw the province nearly double its debt. We posted all-time record-high deficits. Billions had to be taken out of the treasury year after year to cover up scandal after scandal.

On Tuesday of this week, the former member for Windsor–Tecumseh spoke to the Economic Club of Canada. He actually said that the credit rating agencies would have stern words for the government about this budget that the NDP just supported. This is a guy who presided over three credit downgrades—more than any finance minister in recent memory.

Think of how low that bar actually is to get over; this government somehow failed to get over it. A billion dollars in new spending, and a lot of it comes from the NDP's support and the promises that were made. We'll see if they actually become reality; \$3.6 billion in new spending overall in this budget, and this at a time when the deficit is actually going up, not down.

By 2015, Ontario's debt will be over \$300 billion. In the last three years alone, this government has added 122,000 public sector jobs to the payroll, or almost half of the 300,000 that they've added since taking office, while 300,000 manufacturing jobs have left the province, for a number of different reasons: the sky-high green energy prices and the global adjustment that now appears on their hydro bills, and the thicket of red tape that exists in the province.

To say the very least, the Minister of Economic Development and the Minister of Finance get up and talk about the jobs added since the height of the recession, but we simply don't believe them. We don't. As long as the government keeps hiring people, then you'll keep adding

jobs—there's no question about that—but you'll keep shrinking the tax base because you're adding to the public sector jobs and we're not creating private sector jobs in Ontario.

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So the question is: Do we have a real deficit-cutting strategy in this budget? The answer, quite simply, is no. Do we have a debt-reduction strategy in this budget? The answer is no. You can look at the tables for 2015–16, 2016–17 and 2017–18, and they're blank. There's just nothing there. Do we have even the smallest symbol of acknowledgement that these things are priorities for the government? No, we don't.

We got news yesterday that the Bank of Canada is actually looking to raise interest rates in 2014, which could be disastrous for our province. This means that the Bank of Canada basically just called this government's bluff. A 1% increase in interest rates is going to cost us \$500 million; that's a half-billion dollars. It's going to increase the costs for us to borrow money, and we're borrowing money at record speed in Ontario.

The debt clock is ringing up by \$1.8 million every hour that passes, and we're racking up on the actual debt and interest on that debt. In the budget, it clearly says we're paying almost \$12 billion this year to service the debt and interest payments. In two years' time, we'll be paying \$14.5 billion to service our debt in Ontario.

What Ontario really needed was a serious budget to deal with these problems. What Ontario needs now is a serious Premier and a serious government to deal with these problems, not a government that believes the solution to every new problem is a new tax, which we're now seeing with the Metrolinx project. The Premier's stance on that is to bring in more taxes when we have record revenue generation in the province right now because of the two largest tax increases this province has ever seen, under this Liberal government: the health premium, which I alluded to earlier; and, of course, the HST.

Government revenue is up more than \$30 billion over the last decade. We're taking in more money than we ever have before, and we can't find \$2 billion—a mere 2% of the annual budget—to pay for transit. Sometimes in government you have to make the tough decisions. You have to start to make difficult decisions. The easy decision for this Premier—this new Premier of Ontario—was to cozy up to the side that was going to allow her to rack up the credit card total even further. That was the easy thing for her to do to stay in power, and you have a willing partner because everybody knows they love to spend money too.

Sometimes you have to tighten things up. You have to make the tough decisions. Ontarians do demand more from their leaders. Now my friends in the third party are going to get up, they're going to look into the camera, and they're going to say—because they've been saying it for the last couple of days—that all the Tories know how to say is no.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: That's right.

Mr. Todd Smith: To them, I say, "Darn right!" Darn right, we're going to continue to say no. We're going to

say no to passing on record debt to my two daughters in Prince Edward–Hastings. We're going to say no to increasing the debt without a plan to deal with it. We're going to say no to propping up a government so scandal-plagued that it regularly blows \$1 billion for its own partisan political purposes. I say no because there's no price high enough that that government will be able to buy my support. That, my colleagues, is something that you can't say in the third party, despite the fact that you know that you should be saying no to this government. You've got that big hand on your shoulder telling you, "No, do what's best for us, not what's best for the people of Ontario." That's why we're saying no.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Mr. Rick Nicholls: Again, it's a pleasure to rise today and to speak to this programming motion. You know, this motion looks to speed up the passage of the budget, a budget that will add to our debt and do little to assist in the jobs crisis in Ontario; as well as establish a Financial Accountability Office, which was an item on the NDP's ransom list.

I'd like to take a few minutes and talk about the harm that the Liberal overspending has caused the province and the potential impacts of the Liberal-NDP coalition coming together to avoid action on our disastrous debt. At a time when we should be doing all we can to reduce the debt and to lighten the load that our children will be forced to carry, this budget actually increases spending by \$3.6 billion. If any one of us here has been in business before, we know that you cannot stay in business if your expenditures exceed your revenue. Well, this government, Speaker, since 2003 has increased the debt—that's the accumulated debt from Confederation. When they came into power in 2003, the debt for Ontario was \$125 billion. Today, just 10 short years later, that debt has increased from \$125 billion to almost \$300 billion, an increase of around 240%—an increase. How can any business stay successful and stay in business—how can this government, how can this province stay competitive and stay in business with a global economy when in fact we're faced with rising debt continually?

As my colleagues pointed out this morning, with the interest rates at an all-time low but threatening to increase by 2014, we're going to have very serious problems. An increase of 1%—just 1%—in the interest rates will mean that Ontarians will have to pay an additional \$500 million in interest payments, and we get nothing for it. We don't even get a hug for that. They continually add to our debt. If we take a look at it, every child that's born either at the Leamington District Memorial Hospital, in my riding of Chatham–Kent–Essex, or the Chatham–Kent Health Alliance, also in my riding, will have on their backs a \$20,000 debt load from this province.

Currently, we have 600,000 men and women in this province who don't have a job. The budget does nothing to help give them a brighter future. Every year, we toss away \$11 billion just to service the debt, as I was talking about earlier. If there was a ministry of debt retirement,

that ministry would be the third-largest ministry in this provincial government; health being number one, education being number two. It's awful when you take a look and you see what kind of money we are just losing continually. It's a sad, sad state of affairs.

We look at the track record. I'm a firm believer that past performance is an indication of future performance. I look at the budget right now—we were accused of not even looking at the budget. What would make anyone think that this year—this year of all years—would be any different than the other 10 years before, when in fact all they did was add, add, add to the debt and deficit of this wonderful province that we are struggling to hold on to? We don't want to become another Greece; we don't want to be called Ontariopolis. Speaker, we want to remain a leader in Canada today as the number one province, not a bottom-feeder, and that's really where we're at right now.

You look at the scandals—scandal after scandal. I'll start with eHealth, then followed by the air Ornge scandal. We look at the Mississauga and Oakville gas plant scandals. Those account to billions upon billions of dollars.

Now we've got this NDP-Liberal coalition. As we begin to get serious about this, we as the PC Party brought forward a number of bills, good solid healthy bills, to help slowly turn this province around. We presented them here in this wonderful Legislature. We explained it to both the government and third party opposition, how it will help. But oh, no, they think that the PCs don't have any good ideas. Unfortunately, prior to former Premier McGuinty proroguing the Legislature for four months when we couldn't get anything done, they shut down four of our private members' bills that would have helped to turn this around. Then the McGuinty-Wynne government comes in, and we had three other bills, one of them being the Ability to Pay Act, and again, they wouldn't listen. Well, they listened, but they didn't want to do anything about it. Again, the NDP propped up the government and assisted in defeating our bills.

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The NDP-Liberal coalition—I say that with a small C right now, but one of the things I might want to add is the fact that the NDP have propped up this government many times, time and time again. Maybe their call letter should be different; maybe their call letter should be the NDPP, the New Democratic prop party, because that's exactly what they're doing.

They go to this government and they try to negotiate and talk more about, "Well, listen, give us this, give us this, and we'll support your budget." Well, they held the government ransom as well, and because they held the government ransom, the government caved to seven of their demands, which will account for hundreds of millions of dollars on the taxpayers' backs. But what do they care? Right now they feel that they've got the reins of this government in their fingers, and that's not right. They don't have it, but right now they're holding every-

one ransom. What they're doing is they're holding Ontarians ransom. They're holding us all ransom. I look at it, and I go, "Come on, guys, give us a break. The cost is going to be astronomical."

I look at the budget right now. It's around \$127 billion—\$127 billion, with a B, and then we hear the papers saying, "Well, you know, the cost of an election is \$92 million," with an M. That's \$92 million; \$127 billion—let me see here—and if we don't have that election right now—well, we're not going to have that election, so what's it going to cost us? I guarantee you that between now and whenever the next election is going to be, the cost on the taxpayers' backs is going to be far more—it will be times, times, times more than that \$92 million for an election, when, if we got into power, we would slowly start to turn it around. And would we work with the Liberals and the NDP? Of course we would, but we've got to start to turn things around.

We've got to stop this scandal. I look at the people within my own riding, and they see how this government has blown its money and won't hesitate to reach again into the pockets of citizens just a little bit more. It's a sad, sad state of affairs. When we look at it, we say, there's talk about Metrolinx right now. There's just talk, but the concern that we have, and especially the people of Chatham-Kent are saying—hey, listen, we have our infrastructure problems, but we also have our infrastructure solutions. But when I look at this, they want to add 1% to the HST and maybe some other taxes along the way, once again putting their hands into the pockets of Ontarians. The people in Chatham-Kent-Essex are concerned because what will that do maybe to the cost of gasoline throughout the province? You know, 1% on a dollar means a penny, but if it's 1.5%, that's one and a half pennies on every dollar this government is going to grab, and that amounts to billions of dollars once again.

So, again, I appeal to the NDP-Liberal coalition. We need to take a look at this budget. We need to take a look at really what is actually happening here, and we need to find a substantive way to turn things around.

Even seniors in my riding are very, very upset. Last week in Chatham, they organized a protest at the Chatham Retirement Resort to fight changes that are happening with regard to physiotherapy, as an example. Physiotherapists, caregivers and even seniors themselves braved the cold and the rain to have their voices heard, and I am immensely proud of the fighting spirit of the people of Chatham-Kent-Essex.

Don Rhodes, a senior at the retirement resort, was quoted this past week in Chatham This Week. He said that changes will hurt seniors like himself: "When you're not mobile, it's a whole different story. We need these programs. We have a lot of people here that need to keep active, and without being active every day, you've got more people in wheelchairs than you've already got now." We don't need to add to that. These people need access, and there needs to be that funding available, rather than cutting \$44 million out of that particular budget.

Speaker, I get the feeling right now that you're about to stand and cut me off because it's time to break for—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Thank you.

Debate deemed adjourned.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Seeing the time on the clock, this House stands recessed until 10:30.

The House recessed from 1015 to 1030.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Jack MacLaren: It gives me great pleasure to introduce special guests from Ottawa who came here today to meet with our health critic, Christine Elliott, and deputy critic, Bill Walker. It gives me great pleasure to introduce Jennifer and Deborah Wyatt from the TIPES autistic training facility; Dr. Jeff Sherman, a psychologist from Ottawa here to speak about autism; and John Light from John Baird's office in Ottawa.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: It gives me great pleasure to introduce, from Access Alliance, Julie Chamberlain, Naseema Dar, Pinky Paglingayen, Mofazzal Hoque and Sheila Htoo. Also, from the Society of Energy Professionals, we have Judith Logan and Guntis Berzins. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Mr. Lorenzo Berardinetti: I'm pleased to rise to welcome the Society of Energy Professionals to Queen's Park and to recognize all those who are in the gallery, including president Scott Travers; and Frank Pierce, from my riding of Scarborough Southwest.

The society is here to help members understand the issues facing Ontario's energy generation and transmission sector. I hope members will take time to speak to them and enjoy the reception at the end of the day in the legislative dining room.

Hon. John Milloy: I'd like to welcome a good friend from the great riding of Kitchener Centre: Ken Silvester, who is here with his granddaughter Katelyn, who's a grade 5 student studying civics. They're here today to learn about good government.

Mr. Michael Mantha: I'd like to introduce someone who has actually won a very big spot in heaven because she puts up with me all the time. She's the biggest reason why I have the privilege of serving here. I'd like to introduce my wife, Pauline.

Mrs. Donna H. Cansfield: It's my pleasure today to welcome Rev. David ManHong Kim and his wife, Esther, and, along with them, a delegation from South Korea: Rev. Soon Ok Jung, who is the former director of the Korea National Reconciliation Committee, and also Mr. Noh Il Kwak, the chair of the Advanced Political Society in Korea. I'd also like to acknowledge Mr. Jae Chong, who's the executive director of the Dr. Scofield Memorial Foundation; Julia Jung, who's the senior deaconess of the church; and HeeJu Yun, who's a volunteer with the Dr. Scofield Memorial Foundation. I believe they are touring the Legislature, so soon we will have them come in and partake of our question period.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock.

Before I recognize the member from Hamilton East-Stoney Creek, I'd like to announce that earlier this morning, just before the proceedings started, unanimous consent was granted, so that no one else gets the idea that they can just start dressing like that any time they want.

Mr. Paul Miller: I would like to invite all the members of Parliament to the Battle of Stoney Creek this weekend. We're having over 800 to 1,000 re-enactors. My portrayal in the battle will be an artillery captain in the 8th regiment of Her Majesty's Royal Grenadiers.

Also, if I didn't introduce my wife, I'd be in big trouble, as she helped me get in this: my wife, Carole.

It's going to be a great weekend. We're expecting thousands of people.

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: Hello to Joe. Welcome back.

It's my pleasure to introduce two constituents from my riding: Andre Ramsaroop and Scott Travers, who are here with the Society of Energy Professionals. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: I'd like to welcome a constituent of mine, Mr. Ahamad Abdullah, who is the parent of one of our pages here, Lamiha Abdullah. He's here visiting with us in the east gallery.

Hon. Mario Sergio: Speaker, my wife is supposed to be here with a delegation from my riding, attending the Italian flag-raising today. The traffic is probably holding them up. They are here to assist and enjoy the celebration.

As well, I want to invite everyone in the House to join us for the Italian flag-raising.

Mrs. Laura Albanese: It is my pleasure to welcome Julie Pontarollo here to Queen's Park. She is the mother of Jessica Pontarollo, the wonderful page from the great riding of York South-Weston. Mrs. Pontarollo will be joining us this morning in the public gallery.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: I'd like to introduce Virginia Morra and Dave Maura, who are here for the Italian flag-raising this morning.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I'd like to introduce Graham Malcolm, accompanied by his wife, Victoria. They are here to see the workings of Queen's Park. I welcome them here from the riding of Brant.

As most members can see, my other brother, Joe Peters, is here, and his son Nick. Welcome.

Depending on whether or not the member from Hamilton East-Stoney Creek is able to sustain himself in the House today, I may let him dress that like for the entire time.

It is now time for question period.

ORAL QUESTIONS

TRANSIT FUNDING

Mr. Frank Klees: My question is to the Premier.

On February 19, just a few weeks ago, here's what the Premier told Ontarians and this Legislature, through the

Lieutenant Governor, in her speech from the throne: "For the benefit of the entire province, your government intends to work with opposition parties, in a spirit of renewed co-operation, to get the people's business done."

Speaker, we want to take the Premier up on that offer. In that same spirit of co-operation, I'd like to ask the Premier: Will she agree to strike a select committee of the Legislature so that we can help the government find the additional \$2 billion to pay for transit without burdening taxpayers and businesses of this province?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I really wish that as a result of the conversations that I had with the Leader of the Opposition and the opportunities we had to exchange ideas—once the budget was introduced, there was an immediate response that the opposition was not going to support the budget. Without even reading the budget, Mr. Speaker, that was the response.

I truly believe that I have reached out, that I have done my best to work with all members of the Legislature, and I will continue to do that.

The reality is that for decades there has been no commitment on the part of the provincial government to have a dedicated revenue stream to build transit. The member opposite knows full well—he was a Minister of Transportation—there was no dedicated revenue stream for transit. There needs to be, and we're going to make that happen.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Frank Klees: That's precisely why we're making the offer that we're making.

That spirit of renewed co-operation seems to have evaporated, or is it just in order to prop yourself up to stay in government?

I want to read further from that throne speech, Speaker: "Your new government believes that complex times require thoughtful, collaborative solutions." We agree, and that's why we are asking the Premier to take our offer very seriously.

Why will the Premier not agree to strike that select committee of all parties of this Legislature so that we can get to work, while she's having her conversations, with finding that \$2 billion in savings and waste right across this government so we can get on with the construction and dedicate \$2 billion of revenue to transit in this province?

1040

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: A few weeks ago, what the members opposite were asking us to do was to focus on implementing the Drummond commission recommendations, Mr. Speaker, and do that transformation of government that was laid out in Don Drummond's report. We're doing that, and 60% of the recommendations are already in the works or have been implemented. We continue to do the transformation of government. That is finding savings. That is constraining the costs. That is constraining our spending. We're doing all that.

All of that is not going to deliver \$2 billion a year to deal with the congestion issues in the GTHA. The member opposite knows that. He's been a Minister of Trans-

portation. He knows that that has not been a focus of the provincial government for decades. We need to make it a focus, because people need to be able to get around the GTHA, to their homes and to their work.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Renfrew will come to order.

Final supplementary.

Mr. Frank Klees: February 19 was not that long ago. I remember the ceremony here and I remember the awesome commitment that this Premier made to co-operation.

I want to read from the closing remarks of that throne speech: "All parties and each member will be encouraged to contribute to this process, to make their insights known."

"Your new government hopes that ideas will be put forward with optimism and purpose, and that voices will not be raised solely for the pursuit or retention of power."

"Your government is committed to finding real, creative solutions to the issues we face." And then it goes on to say that to do this, it will direct its efforts across the aisle. That's from your throne speech.

Speaker, I ask the Premier one more time. In all seriousness, I ask her: Why will she not agree to the creative idea, to work collaboratively with opposition parties, strike that select committee so that we can get on with our work and fund transit in this province?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I have appreciated the opportunity to meet with the Leader of the Opposition. We have had a number of very good conversations. There are some things where it would be great if we could find a way to co-operate on. For example, I have already mentioned it would have been great for the opposition, the PCs, to have read the budget before rejecting it. It would have been great for the opposition not to have rejected the throne speech. It would be wonderful if every single piece of legislation was not being stalled in this Legislature, legislation would protect kids from cancer, legislation that would support Ontario farmers, legislation that would bring the budget through the process. It would be terrific if we could have that kind of co-operative working relationship.

We're working to constrain expenses. We're working to transform government. We also have to work to invest in transit.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): New question? The member from Nepean–Carleton.

TEACHERS

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Thank you very much, Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity. I have a question to the Premier today.

Last summer, your government handed over hiring rights in our schools to the provincial unions. As a result of Bill 115, we said we would support the bill, but we demanded that the hiring provision be stricken. The government said that they would do that, but after the bill

passed, they stuck in a regulation, 274/12, to appease their union friends.

Now, predictably, school boards and teachers are opposed to this, and that's why our party put forward an opposition day motion to rescind regulation 274. The government opposed that.

But now the metal is hitting the floor, Premier, and school boards are concerned about next year. How is your government going to address the drastic decline of the quality of teaching in our classrooms as a result of your hiring policies? And why aren't you committed to putting the best teacher in the room, not the teacher with the most seniority?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I know that the Minister of Education is going to want to speak to the specifics of that discussion with unions, but let me just say, Mr. Speaker, that I am so pleased that in the time that we have been in office and that I have been in this office we have been able to begin to re-establish the positive working relationship with the education sector, with the teachers, with the support staff and with our school boards, because that relationship, I believe, is fundamental to the achievement and the success of our students in this province. I do not expect the member opposite to value that relationship; that has not been a cornerstone of their practice in this House or when they were a government. It is ours. We believe in that relationship. We believe that it's important that publicly funded education works best when government and the education sector are working together.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Look at this caucus. Most of us have kids in the school system. We value quality education. I know I speak for all my colleagues who actually have kids in the classrooms.

Let me read from three teachers who wrote to the Premier and myself—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I want to hear both the question and the answer.

Please continue.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Let me read from three teachers who wrote to me and to the Premier. Karrie from the Upper Grand district says, "I was hired based on merit" but "with the implementation of regulation 274, I am being denied any opportunity to work within a school community that I love."

Sam from the Ottawa Catholic School Board wrote to me and the Premier and said, "Regulation 274/12 is destroying the concept of merit." And if it was "really about putting students first, let's give them the best and rescind regulation 274/12."

Chris, who wrote to me from Guelph, is very disappointed that the Minister of Education, his own MPP, refuses to meet with him and other teachers in this situation. He writes, "I am afraid the regulation is going to force me to leave the teaching profession."

Premier, will you listen to Karrie, will you listen to Sam and will you listen to Chris, and put the best

teachers back in the classroom, rescind 274 and stop putting—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock, please. Be seated, please. Thank you.

Premier?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Education.

Hon. Liz Sandals: I think it's important to understand that, in fact, regulation 274, although it does look at past experience and issues like seniority, is actually there to make sure that young teachers have an opportunity to get jobs. We want to make sure that we're not looking only at seniority, and we're not looking at family relationships and things like that—that we're actually giving young teachers an opportunity to apply for jobs. We want to make sure that they're posted so that they even know when there is a job available. Boards still have the ability to make the ultimate hiring decisions.

I think we need a bit of an update on regulation 274. In fact, as we speak, there is a working table between OSSTF and the public boards, looking at whether they can agree on modifications.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: If the minister were reading her correspondence as I most certainly am, she would realize that's it's young teachers who are writing in to her and I. If she would meet with her own constituents about this she would recognize that this is a big problem. If she were to talk about boards, she would know that the Toronto District School Board, last evening, wanted to address nepotism and to make sure that not only is this regulation rescinded but that they are actually part of the process. They want to actually eliminate that through conflict of interest so that this would be redundant.

But let me talk about Leslie from Toronto. She says, "It won't matter that the schools' students already know and love the sixth most senior or the 60th most senior applicant, or that none of the five most senior applicants is interested in doing co-curricular activities or that a newly graduated teacher speaks the language of 70% of the schools' parents."

The Toronto District School Board, last night, adopted Leslie's approach. They know as well as I do and Leslie knows that regulation 274 isn't about the best teacher in our classroom. I will say this—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

Minister?

Hon. Liz Sandals: I'm sorry; I don't think the member opposite heard what I said about a working group looking at exactly some of the issues that have been raised by the individual teachers, by school boards and, quite frankly, by the union, because we have been working with our teachers and with our unions. We have been working with our school boards. One of the things that we agreed to was to set up a working table to explicitly look at the—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Renfrew, I want to hear the answer.

Carry on.

1050

Hon. Liz Sandals: We have, as I speak, a working group that's been set up between the OSSTF and the public school boards looking at whether there are changes they want to make to the regulation, because we believe that the best way to get a resolution for this issue is for us all to sit down and work together and come up with a sensible solution that solves everybody's needs.

ACCESS TO INFORMATION

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is for the Premier. Does the Premier believe that staff in the Premier's office should follow the laws of the province when it comes to retaining documents and keeping government accountable?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Yes, I do.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Documents and emails in the cabinet offices are not the personal property of the cabinet ministers; they belong to the public and are supposed to be kept in the public interest. Does the Premier think it is acceptable that staff in the Premier's office and other ministers' offices have failed to keep—and at times deliberately deleted—emails and other documents?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: We have taken these obligations very seriously. I have ensured—and the government House leader went over this yesterday—that all staff are aware of our responsibilities in terms of retaining documents. There has been training for staff, and for new staff, so that they understand what the responsibilities are.

We have provided more than 130,000 documents of the nature that the leader of the third party is asking about. So it is very important to me that we follow the rules, that we retain the documents that we are meant to retain, and that that applies to all staff.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: People are very worried today because they feel that governments that are supposed to be working for them seem more concerned about protecting their own political hides. They see it at city hall in Toronto, they see it in Ottawa and, sadly, they see it here day in and day out. Political staff in the government are supposed to follow the rules and not bury politically inconvenient details. How can Ontarians trust that this Premier won't allow this to happen in the future when the same abuses keep happening over and over and over again?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: As I said, I came into this office and I made it very clear that we were going to have an open, transparent process around all of the issues that we deal with, but the issue of the relocation of the gas plants was obviously front and centre. I made it clear that all staff were going to be following the rules, retaining

documents that we were meant to be retaining, and provide training for staff so that they would understand, even if they had understood before, that they were going to have a renewed understanding of what those rules were.

We have done all of that. We have provided documentation as we have been asked by the committee, and we will continue to do so.

GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My next question is also for the Premier. In tough times, people need their government to be accountable and transparent. They've been asked to make sacrifices, to make tough choices, and when they see their government scrambling to hide facts and squander scarce public resources, they feel like they're being played for fools.

Yesterday I met with the former parliamentary budget officer, Kevin Page. We talked about the importance of real accountability and giving families access to real information about how the government is spending their money.

Is the government prepared to use the new Financial Accountability Office to give people accurate, independent information on government decisions?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I think we've said quite clearly in the process of our discussions around the passage of the budget that having a Financial Accountability Officer in place as an independent voice on these issues was something that we believed, as a team, was a good idea. It was a good idea that the leader of the third party raised, and we are going to work to that end and introduce legislation to create that office. So yes, I think it's a good idea. We've said yes, and we look forward to working with the leader of the third party and, I hope, the Leader of the Opposition on that.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: The government is moving ahead with plans for a sell-off of government assets such as plans to sell ServiceOntario and Ontario Northland. The government has also made it clear that they plan to move ahead with plans for more corporate tax giveaways and tax cuts for Ontario's highest income earners as soon as the books in this province are balanced. Is the Premier ready to put these schemes on hold until the new Financial Accountability Office has a chance to actually review them?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: We are going to continue to make decisions to bring policy forward, to bring legislation forward. One of the pieces of that will be the creation of the Financial Accountability Office. But everything that we are doing, we are doing with an eye to what is in the best interests of the people of the province and how we can maximize service to people and reduce costs as we go along. We will continue in that work. We are not going to put all of the work of the government on hold while we bring forward one piece of legislation. There has to be a complex introduction of various pieces of policy and legislation over time. We will continue to

do that, and one of the pieces of legislation will be on the Financial Accountability Office.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: People feel like they're falling behind. Too often, when they look at their government, they see their needs being pushed aside so the government can move ahead with plans that help their well-connected insiders, and leave them paying more and getting less. A Financial Accountability Office is one small step towards greater transparency and greater accountability, Speaker. Can the Premier ensure that she will allow this new office to do its job, and not ram through decisions before it can be established?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I look forward to the discussion on the legislation of the Financial Accountability Office; it will be a good discussion and I think that it's a good idea.

I want to just let the people of the province know that we are in the process now of bringing forward a budget that is going to make a difference in their lives. It is going to be a budget that's going to help young people find jobs, Mr. Speaker. It's a budget that is going to invest in infrastructure, in communities across the province. It's a budget, when it is passed, if it is passed, that will allow us to help people to make changes in their day-to-day lives.

The good news that we have received in the last couple of days is that the credit agencies have said that we are on the right track. Standard and Poor's yesterday said, "Supporting the ratings are what we view as Ontario's large, wealthy and well-diversified economy.... The province is forecasting an improvement in its operating deficit and after-capital deficits; both deficits outperformed the government's forecast for the fourth consecutive year." We're on the right track.

APPRENTICESHIP TRAINING

Mr. Monte McNaughton: My question this morning is for the Premier. Premier, earlier this week we spoke about the 25,000 jobs now at risk throughout Ontario due to the Liberal-NDP decision to cancel the Apprenticeship Tax Credit without any consultations. We spoke about 8,000 jobs that the NDP is risking in northern Ontario and we spoke about the thousands of jobs in and around London and Windsor now in jeopardy.

In Brantford, an area that our Speaker knows well, this Liberal decision has put four call centres at risk. Together, NCO, Wipro Technologies, Union Gas and Extend Communications add over 1,000 important jobs to Brantford and Brant county. Premier, you blew nearly \$1 billion to cancel the gas plants in Mississauga and Oakville. Are you so desperate for revenue that you are willing to risk 1,000 good jobs in Brantford?

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Premier.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Economic Development, Trade and Employment.

Hon. Eric Hoskins: I'm proud of this government's record over the last several years of creating more than

400,000 jobs in this province, many of those jobs in the manufacturing centre; many of those, frankly, are call centre jobs as well.

In Brantford, which is a place I know well and which I know is an important place—you know, Brantford just recently benefited from a project that we funded under the Southwestern Ontario Development Fund. I was proud to be able to be part of an announcement of \$1.5 million to a company called Hematite in Brantford to support jobs, for them to add more lines and more employment in that important city as they recover from this difficult recession that we've all. So I've had the privilege of being able to announce a number of projects, as the member opposite of course knows well, two of those projects being in his riding. The Southwestern Ontario Development Fund is making a big difference and impacting precisely the way the member opposite would like.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Monte McNaughton: Back to the Premier: Earlier this week I received an important letter from the mayor of Chatham-Kent, Randy Hope, addressed to Minister Duguid. Mayor Hope expressed concerns as a result of the proposed changes to the Apprenticeship Tax Credit and the thousands of jobs at risk in Chatham-Kent and across this province.

1100

The letter outlines the case of Minacs, one of Ontario's largest contact centres, which wishes to continue its expansion into Ontario but is now being forced to look at US locations, putting 3,400 current jobs at risk. Mayor Hope's letter outlines a simple and easily implemented solution to your problem.

Premier, are you going to listen to the mayor and reverse your decision to kill the Apprenticeship Tax Credit? Or will you continue to risk up to 25,000 good-paying jobs throughout this province?

Hon. Erie Hoskins: Of course, we respect the opinion of Mayor Randy Hope of Chatham-Kent, particularly when it comes to his views on the Southwestern Ontario Development Fund. He was instrumental in providing his support to ensure that not only the program existed—despite the fact that the official opposition voted against the Southwestern Ontario Development Fund and put measures in place to even delay its passage in the Legislature and delay these funds getting to the good people of southwestern Ontario.

The mayor, whom I've met personally as well and spoken to on this and other issues—his recommendations are always welcome on this side of the Legislature. I have to say that in terms of call centres as well, in Barrie, I was very proud to hear not that long ago of a \$20-million annual investment by HGS in Barrie. The mayor there, incidentally, was also very happy, because that's created 500 new jobs in Barrie in call centres.

MANUFACTURING JOBS

Mr. Peter Tabuns: My question is to the Premier. When the government established the Green Energy Act,

it promised that green energy technology in Ontario would be built in Ontario and create jobs in Ontario. Can the Premier confirm that her government now plans to abandon provisions that require green energy companies to build equipment and create jobs here in Ontario?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: In the introduction of the Green Energy Act and the work that we've done in renewable energy over the last couple of years, we have jump-started an industry that really didn't exist in Ontario. Our commitment to continuing to work with the green energy sector and maximize the job creation out of that sector is firm. We believe this is an important industry to the province of Ontario, which is why our commitment to it remains strong.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Premier, that doesn't actually answer the question. The push for renewable energy was supposed to be an opportunity to create good-quality manufacturing jobs here in Ontario. Sadly, your government's approach has been marred by broken promises and flip-flops. Now it looks like you're giving up on good manufacturing jobs here in Ontario.

Provinces like Quebec and countries around the world have been able to ramp up renewable power and ensure that the manufacturing happens locally to create local jobs. Their programs haven't been scrapped by the WTO.

Will this government finally admit it has made a complete and utter mess and look to other provinces to ensure that we keep manufacturing jobs here in Ontario?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: No, I won't admit that, because we've created 31,000 jobs in Ontario. We've built enough clean energy to power 900,000 homes. I really would have thought the member opposite would have been supportive of that initiative, that the member opposite would have thought that was a very good thing.

What we have announced today—and the Minister of Energy is speaking about it today—is that we believe that the process whereby some of the green energy infrastructure that has been sited needs to be modified. It's one of the things that, when I became the leader of the party and the Premier, I said we were going to deal with: a better process going forward for municipalities to have a stronger voice. That's what we have announced, Mr. Speaker. That's what the Minister of Energy has been working on.

We recognize that programs need to be modified and that processes need to change, but they need to change based on the evidence of good successes and the gaps we have discovered.

SCHOOL SAFETY

Mr. Mike Colle: Mr. Speaker, I have a question for the Minister of Education. In our schools, we have some of the best teachers, we have some of the best students, working hard, and our parents are doing their best to ensure our schools remain the best, along with our teachers.

But one of the concrete issues that parents have come to me about, over the last while especially, is about the

safety of their children. They are worried about how safe our schools are. They are worried about their kids coming to school safely and going home safely. They really get upset when they hear that there's a lockdown in one of our schools, so the question I want to pose to you, Minister, is: As this education system delivers great education, what are we doing in a concrete way, as a government, to work with school boards to make sure our kids are safe in school?

Hon. Liz Sandals: Thank you to the member from Eglinton-Lawrence, who is always an advocate for the schools, parents and kids in his riding.

Our government knows that in order for our students to learn well, they need to learn in a safe and accepting school environment. Since 2003, we've invested over \$360 million in safe schools and equity and inclusive education initiatives. We actually recently reopened the Safe Welcome Program with an additional investment of \$10 million to give school staff more control over who enters the schools, so that we can keep our kids safe once they're inside the school.

Through working with organizations like the Ontario Association of Chiefs of Police and the committee of youth officers of Ontario, we've developed safety protocols. Elementary and secondary schools are required to work with local police on safety protocols, on lockdown protocols, to make sure we keep our kids safe.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Mike Colle: Thank you, Minister. The principals, the parents and the students are telling me very directly that one of the things that we've done with the school boards that really makes our schools safe is our police officers in the schools. That is being very well received, and it is working to prevent crime from coming anywhere near our schools.

The other thing that is very apparent is that in some neighbourhoods, there are very few issues about safety, but in other neighbourhoods in my riding of Eglinton-Lawrence, there are some serious risks. These are in our vulnerable, at-risk neighbourhoods where—I know it's hard to believe in some situations, but some kids are basically afraid to go to school. They may get shot going to school or shot on the way home from school, so this is a very, very traumatic concern for our parents, our principals and our students.

I want to know: What are we doing to ensure that, in these at-risk neighbourhoods which are real and very, very challenged—what are we doing extra to protect the kids in those schools?

Hon. Liz Sandals: Thank you to the member. I too would like to thank the local police and the school boards who have worked together to provide school officer programs. They certainly have an impact.

With respect to demographic issues, we actually have something called the Learning Opportunities Grant, which is targeted at school boards that have a higher-than-usual number of low-income neighbourhoods in their communities. That's actually almost half a billion dollars a

year that goes specifically to the Learning Opportunities Grant to support kids.

Our government also provides \$10 million annually to specific high-needs schools in urban areas that face challenges like poverty and crime. We're also working to provide children in low-income areas with summer learning opportunities. If we can get this budget passed, we have an additional \$12 million targeted at summer learning camps in high-risk neighbourhoods.

ACCESS TO INFORMATION

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Thank you, Speaker, and good morning. My question this morning is for the Premier. Premier, a few minutes ago, you spoke about a new, open and transparent style of governing. In fact, you mentioned the fact—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities will come to order.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Thank you for your new style of open and transparent speaking.

You mentioned that your staff and your government has been given training with respect to the gas plant scandal documents. My one question is: Does that training include using Gmail accounts for your staff to hide the information from the freedom of information officer?

1110

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Government House leader.

Hon. John Milloy: We've addressed issues around emails, both yesterday and today, and the Information and Privacy Commissioner is looking into the matter.

I would also remind the member that we've had 130,000 documents—that's an estimate of the number of pages that we've given the committee.

What's interesting is the way that the honourable member keeps trying to escape from the simple fact, and it's still there: They opposed the very gas plants.

Again, we ask what their estimate is. We also ask, when they did their estimate, whether they added the extra \$85,000 that they were paying because of the robocalls that they had to promote the fact that they were opposed to the gas plants and they were the only ones who would cancel it, according to their very own robocall.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Unfortunately, I didn't get an answer to my question about whether the training included using secret Gmail accounts for the Premier's staff—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Order.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: I can imagine why they're a little riled this morning, Speaker.

We have melaniefrancis28@gmail.com—of course, you know who I mean. She's the lawyer in the House leader's office, using a Gmail account to talk about the gas plant transaction. We have mmsmith442@gmail.com

—that's Monique Smith—talking about the gas plant, dealing with your office.

There are a lot of Gmail accounts here. Let me ask you a question, Premier. Are these Gmail accounts because the freedom of information cannot get at these—

Interjections.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: I understand some of these people are gone today, but we also understand—and I'd like you to answer—were these Gmail accounts used because you have trained them that you can't have a freedom-of-information request for Gmail accounts? Is that it?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Renfrew, are you okay? Just checking.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound: The time that I'm standing, you're not supposed to be making any sound.

Government House leader.

Hon. John Milloy: Mr. Speaker, it's kind of passing strange that he's saying we're hiding documents and he in fact has the documents. We have made—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound, even when I'm sitting, you're not supposed to be making some of that sound. Thank you.

Hon. John Milloy: We have made every effort to provide the committee with documents; in fact, the Premier, when she assumed office, offered to have a government-wide search for relevant documents, and the opposition turned it down. As I say, 130,000 pages is the estimate of what we've given the committee. We also have, within that, 30,000 which have come from the Premier's office.

In terms of the responsibility of all government officials, including political staff, we have instituted training and systems in various ministers' offices to make sure that records are safe and in compliance with the law.

CORRECTIONAL FACILITIES

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: My question is to the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services. The minister, yesterday, made promises to EMDC workers that she would do something about the conditions at Elgin-Middlesex Detention Centre, but the minister has made many promises, and conditions have only deteriorated in London and at jails across the province. Can the minister explain why this time we should believe that she is serious and will finally take the necessary actions?

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: I want to thank the member from London-Fanshawe for her question.

Yes, indeed, yesterday I had a great meeting with the leadership of OPSEU with regard to EMDC. As you know, the health and safety of the correctional officers and the inmates at EMDC is my number one priority. So we discussed the 12-point plan, what should be the first

thing that is burning, that we can do as soon as possible. We had a great dialogue. We agree on what we're going to do from now until the end of June, and then we'll move forward with the rest of the improvements in this detention centre.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: The minister has talked about creating a board to oversee EMDC and outright dismissed my suggestion to include correctional officers on the board. Without this representation, we know that this board will be nothing more than a PR exercise. It will be destined to fail. Years of promises did not fix the problems at EMDC, and a weak board will not, either.

It's clear that this minister is unable to do her job, and the lives of workers and inmates are on the line. Will the minister resign so her government can take action to resolve the problems at EMDC immediately?

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: Again, I want to thank everyone, the seven members of the OPSEU with whom I met yesterday, and those who work as correctional officers in EMDC. We had a very frank conversation. I wanted to take the opportunity to thank them, for, on short notice, they came to meet with me. Most importantly, we discussed how to work together to improve the conditions at EMDC and across the province.

The president of OPSEU was happy with the meeting and said, "I'm glad that Minister Meilleur is giving" correctional officers "the attention they deserve. If we can continue on this path, it" will "lead to much-needed improvements and will ultimately save lives."

SENIOR CITIZENS

Ms. Soo Wong: My question is for the minister responsible for seniors. Ontario has the most diverse seniors population in Canada. In fact, 55% of Canada's immigrant seniors reside in Ontario, and one third of them speak a mother tongue other than English or French. What is more, 7% report no knowledge of either English or French. As a result, they may find themselves unable to access the services available to them in our province.

I know that in my riding of Scarborough-Agincourt, many retirement homes and long-term-care facilities such as Tendercare, Mon Sheong, Shepherd Village and St. Paul's L'Amoreaux offer programs and assistance in languages other than English and French.

Mr. Speaker, through you to the minister, can he please tell the House what measures are being taken to ensure that seniors in diverse communities like mine, like Scarborough-Agincourt, are supported in Ontario?

Hon. Mario Sergio: I would like to thank the member from Scarborough-Agincourt for a very important question indeed.

Our government is dedicated to serving Ontario's diverse population. It is my commitment and that of this government to ensure that seniors in Ontario live in a secure and very supportive environment.

We are working hard to collaborate with our partners across government to develop and support culturally ap-

ropriate services and resources which cater to the various languages spoken to and by Ontario seniors. Some of these services include: multicultural seniors' fairs; seniors' active living fairs held throughout the province, including northern Ontario communities; presentations by the Ontario Seniors' Secretariat, with a range of multicultural seniors' organizations; and also a guide to programs and services for seniors in five different languages.

Speaker, we do this and we'll continue to do more on behalf of our seniors.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Soo Wong: It's good to hear from the minister that our government has taken action to ensure that Ontario is supporting its diverse seniors population.

I know that in my riding of Scarborough–Agincourt, local agencies and community groups such as ACSA and CICS help inform seniors of some of the programs available in our province.

We also are aware that in just five years, Ontario's seniors' population will outnumber children aged 15 and under. The fastest growth will occur in the oldest age group, as over 75 years of age is projected to be more than double and the 90-plus group will be more than triple.

Can the minister inform this Legislature of some of the initiatives and public education efforts implemented by our government to improve the quality of life of all Ontario seniors?

1120

Hon. Mario Sergio: This government is working very hard to make Ontario the best place in North America to grow old by:

—continuing to deliver information fairs in northern Ontario and remote communities;

—funding the seniors' infoline through ServiceOntario that provides a multilingual capacity as well;

—providing a guide to programs and services for seniors in French, Chinese, Italian, Spanish, Portuguese and Punjabi; and

—providing a guide called Diversity in Action: A Toolkit for Residential Settings for Seniors to increase cultural awareness in seniors' homes.

Most recently, I was also very glad to join the MPP for Scarborough–Agincourt for a seniors' round table and the Minister of Rural Affairs for the launching of the Seniors' Month kickoff in the beautiful city of Peterborough. We are continuing to demonstrate this government's will and commitment to a healthy and secure environment for all our citizens in Ontario.

CORRECTIONAL FACILITIES

Mr. Robert Bailey: My question is to the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services. Minister, during your government's term of office, we've seen the prison population at the Elgin–Middlesex Detention Centre and other prisons in Ontario increase from one to two inmates per cell to three and four per cell. Today, Ontario's prisons are bursting at the seams. I've seen this

first-hand, Minister. Your decision to close five jails in southwestern Ontario and strip hundreds of beds from the corrections system has contributed to this.

On Tuesday of this week, you blamed everyone else for the knives, drugs, riots, fires and overcrowding in our prison system. They're wreaking havoc on Ontario's prisons.

Minister, the buck stops with you. Will you stand in this House today and admit that there's no one else here to blame but yourself and your inept government?

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: Mr. Speaker, I'm very, very confused here. This question is coming from a party that closed 19 jails in Ontario and did away with almost every rehabilitation program, so I'm not about to take any lessons from that party.

What I want to do is to improve the situation in our correctional facilities, and since I've been appointed to that ministry, that's what I'm doing. That's why I have regular meetings with OPSEU, and we will continue to have regular meetings with OPSEU to make sure that the situation improves. At the end of the day, I want to make sure that everybody is safe: those workers who come to do a good job every day and those inmates that we have responsibility for.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary? The member for Elgin–Middlesex–London.

Mr. Jeff Yurek: Back to the minister: Minister, I'm going to help you out with your confusion here. The problems at the Elgin–Middlesex Detention Centre this week are a result of your neglect. The spread of the fires on Wednesday was a result of EMDC's antiquated meal hatches. Your 12-point plan introduced last August promised new meal hatches for this very reason. However, construction has not yet begun. During these fires, correctional officers lacked enough fire-related equipment and many had to use their own shirts to avoid smoke inhalation. Adequate fire-related equipment was also on that 12-point plan that you did not deliver on.

Minister, you're not doing your job, and when there are lives at stake, you don't deserve a second chance. Will you do the honourable thing and resign?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Thank you.

Minister.

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: I'm going to let the member from Elgin–Middlesex know—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Minister.

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: Let me say to the member what we have done so far. We have hired 11 new full-time correctional officers. We now have 24-hour nursing that was implemented. We have a mental health nurse. We hired three more operational managers. We are building a new control module for staff. We have a superintendent and deputies touring many times a week. We have operational managers, and what they should do is tour every day, and that's what they are doing now. The capacity is monitored every day.

Again, the previous government closed 19 jails, slashed funding and gutted our rehab program—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I'm going to ask the member from Halton to come to order and the member from Prince Edward—Hastings to come to order, and if he wouldn't mind going to his seat so I can tell him the same thing just in case he doesn't get it.

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: What they have done is, they have adopted a failed American state warehousing approach, and that's what we're trying to correct. Your party's decisions have led to the majority of the challenges that we are facing today.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Give me a break. You've been in government for three terms. Do your jobs.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member for Nepean—Carleton will come to order as well.

New question.

COMMUNITY HEALTH SERVICES

Ms. Sarah Campbell: To the Minister of Infrastructure: The Mary Berglund Community Health Centre in Ignace is one of the top health care facilities in the north, with people from across the region travelling to the CHC to access its services.

In 2010, through the Ontario Realty Corp., this government more than doubled its rent, putting their long-term viability at risk. After much pressure, the North West LHIN agreed to provide the Mary Berglund CHC with a temporary and partial funding increase to 2015, after which time the CHC will be forced to further cut staff and services or close its doors.

My question is simple: Is the Ministry of Infrastructure so short on cash that it has to pillage other departments to pay its bills?

Hon. Glen R. Murray: Let's be clear here: The Mary Berglund Community Health Centre is paying \$5-a-square-foot rent. I would hardly describe that as an onerous level of rent. I don't know if anyone in this House knows of an organization that pays \$5-per-square-foot rent. Outside there it's \$30 or \$40, and in most small towns, in Peterborough, you pay a lot more. As a matter of fact, what we can determine is that the going rate for rent right now is \$12 a square foot. By any measure, Mary Berglund has a very good deal.

We have been working right now because the policy of the government, so that we don't artificially subsidize through the back door, is to have a market rent, which would in this case normally be \$10 or \$12. But there is a default position for some centres which has been in place for about 15 years which is to go to a standard \$5-a-square-foot rent.

We're working on other solutions, but right now I don't think the challenge is the rent they're paying.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Sarah Campbell: Minister, this situation is not acceptable. Your department is working with facts and figures that are way out of line with a community of

Ignace's size and northern location. Other comparable CHCs in the north that occupy similar spaces pay \$60,000 rent while Mary Berglund CHC is forced to pay \$200,000 a year. Something is not right. They do not have 40,000 square feet; they have 1,700. They are not paying \$5 a square foot, let me tell you.

Minister, I urge you to fix this problem by either lowering the rent to a more reasonable amount or selling the building to the CHC for a nominal amount. We need action now to avoid another health care crisis in north-western Ontario.

Minister, what are you willing to do to ensure that your department fixes this situation?

Hon. Glen R. Murray: That being said, Mr. Speaker, I do agree with the member's point. She's absolutely right. We have to reconcile to get a rent. From what I understand—I am working with you on this and we're on the same page on it—the volume of space that I understand Mary Berglund has is part of the problem. They're in a building that has a lot of challenges with it.

What can we do about this? Well, the local LHIN and Infrastructure Ontario are working with the health ministry to try and reconcile the rent and the payment system right now because they can't afford it. We're also looking at the amount of room, which I am told—and I will be going up there as soon as the House rises to personally visit the site and I would be happy to tour it with you, to try and see if we can reduce the amount or find other ways to reduce the amount of space so that the storage or surplus space they don't need they don't have to pay for.

We're very committed to working with you on a solution. The point that rent is very high: Until someone shows me other evidence, it looks like it's about half what the going rate is.

SMALL BUSINESS

Mr. Joe Dickson: My question is for the Attorney General. Currently, on-site winery retail stores are open on Labour Day, Canada Day, Thanksgiving, Victoria Day and Family Day in areas where there is a tourist exemption bylaw as implemented by the local municipality.

1130

However, there are still many statutory holidays when winery retail stores cannot open for business and take advantage of opportunities to sell our fine Ontario wine on some of their busiest days. I know that the Alcohol and Gaming Commission of Ontario, an agency that reports to you, the Minister of the Attorney General, administers a variety of authorization policies for liquor manufacturers' stores. Could the Attorney General please tell us what recent progress has been made to further improve the conditions that encourage the success of small businesses that serve tourists across Ontario, particularly those in rural communities?

Hon. John Gerretsen: I want to thank the member from Ajax—Pickering for that excellent question. We all know that wineries, breweries and distilleries form an

important part of Ontario's economy, and the culture of Ontario wines and beers has become world-famous and renowned over the last number of years.

The Alcohol and Gaming Commission was asked to revise their policy on operating days for on-site retail stores, and I'm pleased to announce that the on-site stores are now permitted to open on all nine holidays listed under the Retail Business Holidays Act, which include Easter Sunday, Good Friday, New Year's and Christmas, in addition to the days that they're already allowed to.

This new policy means that if a local municipality passes a tourist exemption bylaw, which is necessary, on-site retail stores will be able to offer tours and sell their products to visiting tourists and local residents on long weekends and holidays. Small businesses in both rural Ontario and urban communities are the cornerstone of Ontario's economy, and we want to make sure that this business prospers.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Joe Dickson: I thank the Attorney General for that answer. It's good to hear that this government supports our small businesses and local wineries and breweries.

While an expansion of days open for business is a welcome change, there is also an issue of operating hours. Currently, on-site retail stores selling alcohol on Sundays are limited to operating hours between 11 a.m. and 6 p.m., yet many of these stores are busiest on the weekend, and longer hours could provide retail stores with an opportunity to maximize their business potential and consumers with greater access to their products. Mr. Speaker, could the Attorney General please inform this House if action has been taken on this issue?

Hon. John Gerretsen: Action has been taken, because in addition to extending the operating days to include all statutory holidays that I mentioned before for on-site winery, brewery and distillery retail stores, they're now able to open between 9 a.m. and 11 p.m. all seven days of the week. By making this change, we as a government are succeeding in improving conditions that best encourage the success of small businesses as well as the options for consumers. With on-site retail stores open on more days and for longer hours, more winery and brewery and distillery tours will be offered, and more made-in-Ontario products will be sold, which is good for all of us. This is just one way in which we as a government are making progress in supporting small business and the consumers in Ontario.

ONTARIO DRUG BENEFIT PROGRAM

Mr. Ted Arnott: My question is for the Minister of Health. Idiopathic pulmonary fibrosis is a rare, lethal lung disease. Most people diagnosed with IPF are told that without a double lung transplant they have between two and five years to live. However, there is a new drug that is giving patients like Barbara Skinner of Georgetown hope. Esbriet appears to slow the progression of the disease and provides patients and their families with valuable time together.

Last October, Health Canada approved Esbriet for use in Canada; however, it's not covered by OHIP currently. I'm told it costs approximately \$3,800 a month—a cost most Ontarians without private drug coverage can't afford. I wrote to the minister, and spoke to her about it on April 11 in this chamber; I know she's aware of it. What is the minister doing to ensure that all Ontarians who suffer from IPF have access to Esbriet?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Thank you to the member for the question and thank you to the many members who have written me on this particular issue. I know how important it is that when people have an illness and there is a drug that can help them with that, we do everything we can to get access to those particular drugs. However, there is a process we go through. It is not a political process. It is a process removed from government, where an independent panel looks at the drugs, looks at the evidence and gives advice on whether or not certain drugs should be funded. In this particular case, that process is well under way.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary. The member from Durham.

Mr. John O'Toole: Like my colleague, I have also shared information with you from my constituent Laurie Fowler, who is the strongest advocate that I have ever met for her mother, Virginia Koury. Minister, you would know that she was recently diagnosed with IPF, as has been mentioned. Virginia would be an excellent candidate for treatment with Esbriet.

Minister, your drug review process in Ontario is broken. It does not take into account the life-threatening risk of IPF and the need to take Esbriet in the mild to moderate early stages of the disease. Minister, patients simply do not have the time to wait for your bureaucratic review process. In Canada, there are 3,000 deaths per year related to IPF. Esbriet, as well as a promising new drug, pirfenidone, have been approved by Health Canada. Why are you not approving this drug for Ontario patients today?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: The member opposite knows very well that Health Canada approval does not mean instant approval on our drug benefit plan. We do have a process. I have written to these members and others to confirm that both of these drugs are being reviewed by the independent panel.

I think it's important that we take our responsibility very seriously when it comes to putting the process in place and putting the funding in place to back up these drugs, particularly for patients with very high drug costs. I am very pleased with the work of the review panel. They are doing the very diligence that is required to make sure that the most people get access to the drugs that they need.

HORSE RACING INDUSTRY

M^{me} France Gélinas: Ma question est pour la première ministre. Sudbury Downs, the racetrack in my riding of Nickel Belt, will be racing for the first time this season

at 1:30 on Sunday. It should have been a happy day, but they cannot fill their race cards, in part because of the limited purse; yet they have \$2.5 million in their purse pool. Can the Premier confirm that this money, which was collected in the north, will stay in the north?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Rural Affairs.

Hon. Jeff Leal: First of all, it's good news that they're back racing at Sudbury Downs. They're also racing at Kawartha Downs, Dresden, Flamboro Downs, Woodbine, Mohawk, Hanover, Rideau Carleton, Sudbury Downs and Western Fair. We want to thank the panel—the honourable John Snobelen, the honourable Elmer Buchanan and the honourable John Wilkinson—who are doing an incredible job in restructuring the race industry in the province of Ontario.

I tell everybody to take advantage of Saturdays, Mondays and Wednesdays to get out to your local racetracks; there are wonderful cards. Horse racing is here to stay in Ontario, and this government is supporting an important industry in rural Ontario.

Mme France Gélinas: That was a very disappointing answer. There is \$2.5 million in a purse account in northern Ontario that is at risk of being shipped elsewhere. It looks like this government is trying to run this industry into the ground. The number of race days at Sudbury Downs was 63 last year. We raced twice a week this year; we got 20 days. The purses at Sudbury Downs used to be \$50,000 a race night. We're now at \$30,000, yet the cost of feeding, training and caring for those horses is not going down. Will the government change their minds and their wrong-headed ways, and allow Sudbury Downs enough race days and purse money to maintain this industry, the only racetrack in northern Ontario, and sustain the thousands of jobs that it supports in Nickel Belt?

Hon. Jeff Leal: I want to thank the member from Nickel Belt, of course, for her great interest in a very important industry to rural Ontario. Particular to Sudbury Downs, if the member would be so kind after question period today to provide me with that information, I would certainly take it to the officials—Karen Chan, who works within the Ministry of Agriculture and Food, and, of course, the horse racing panel: the honourable John Snobelen, the honourable Elmer Buchanan and the honourable John Wilkinson. I'll take a representation today after question period, and we'll take a look at it.

CORRECTION OF RECORD

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Kenora-Rainy River on a point of order.

Ms. Sarah Campbell: I would like to correct my record. In my supplementary, I mistakenly said that the Mary Berglund CHC occupies 1,700 square feet. It actually should be 7,200, which makes their rent at about \$27.70 a square foot.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member has the right to correct her record, and that's a point of order.

A point of order from the Premier.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I just want to remind everyone and encourage them to come out to the farmers' market on the lawn of Queen's Park and enjoy some great Ontario food.

VISITOR

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Speaking of the farmers' market, my other, other brother is here in the Speaker's gallery, and that is the former Speaker of the House: Steve Peters is here. I suspect he's going to be outside eating some good Ontario product as well.

There are no deferred votes. This House stands recessed until 1 p.m.

The House recessed from 1140 to 1300.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Steve Clark: I'd like to introduce, in the west members' gallery, members of the Ontario Dental Association who are here for debate on my private member's bill, Bill 70: President Dr. Arthur Worth; President-elect Dr. Rick Caldwell; Vice-President Dr. Jerry Smith, and some of the board of directors: Dr. Victor Kucher, Dr. Ron Yim, Dr. Raffy Chouljian, Dr. Grace Lee, Dr. Larry Tenaschuk; Mr. Tom Magyarody, executive director, and Mr. Frank Bevilacqua. I'd like to welcome them. Let's give them all a round of applause.

Applause.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Welcome.

Mrs. Jane McKenna: I'd also like to welcome two of my constituents who are coming, but they're not here yet. They are here to support the member for Leeds-Grenville as well for Bill 70. They'll be joining us later, I'm going to say in an hour or so: Dr. Larry Pedlar, co-chair of the Coalition to Restore Spousal Rights and Freedoms, and Dr. Vipan Maini.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

WATERLOO AIR SHOW

Mr. Michael Harris: This weekend marks the fifth annual Waterloo Air Show in my riding of Kitchener-Conestoga. Over the years, support for this exceptional event has grown steadily among fans and the Canadian military, which has and continues to showcase some of its most impressive planes to thousands of spectators each year.

For the 2013 show, I'm proud to welcome the return of the world-famous Canadian Snowbirds, along with the crowd-pleasing CF-18 Demo Hornet. This year, the theme of the CF-18 Demo Team is "The Common Thread," which signifies the ties Canadians of all backgrounds have to this country.

For the first time at the air show, Disney's newest character, Dusty, from the film Planes will come to life

and join in the excitement in the sky. Jane Wicker will also perform the breathtaking wing walk across her Stearman aircraft.

I encourage all members and those watching at home to come out with your friends and family to enjoy a fantastic weekend full of great activities and performances by talented Canadians. Gates open at 10 a.m. and the air show begins at 12:30 p.m., running until 4 p.m. Saturday and Sunday.

I would also like to take this time to thank the hundreds of volunteers who make this event possible, as well as the co-producers, David White and Richard Cooper, who will also be flying his Aero L-29 Delfin plane.

I would also like to make a special mention of the Canadian military members who participate in this event. I look forward to having you in the region this coming Saturday and Sunday.

BATTLE OF STONEY CREEK

Mr. Paul Miller: This weekend marks the 200th commemoration of the June 5 Battle of Stoney Creek. Battlefield Park will be awash in re-enactors in uniforms brightening the landscape with their vivid colours but, more importantly, with their vivid reminders. As I've said many times before, this was a pivotal battle that ensured our place in Canada, not the United States.

The re-enactors will represent the British, aboriginal and American participants in the battle. They will be remembered:

—Friday evening at the Smith's Knoll parade, memorial service and Battlefield Cemetery rededication;

—the 100th anniversary of the Battlefield Monument on Friday at 1 o'clock;

—and the re-enactments on Saturday and Sunday.

It is my honour today to have the support of this chamber to wear my uniform for this weekend's re-enactments. I am representing a British captain in the 8th Regiment of the Grenadiers, who fought in the Battle of Stoney Creek.

This weekend has been made possible by the stellar efforts of the city of Hamilton and Battlefield Park staff, very ably led by curator Susan Ramsay, who I'm proud to have worked with as a re-enactor in the past. I want to extend my sincere appreciation to Susan and her staff for their unwavering dedication to the history of our city, their unfailing enthusiasm to meet the goals of Battlefield Park and their loyalty to the citizens of our city.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Just so the member knows, I did correct someone out in the hallway. They said that you were in part of a ballet of the Nutcracker, and I said no.

Mr. Paul Miller: You said no?

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I said no, just to make sure you are aware.

MARK CREEDON

Mr. Bob Delaney: This is a tribute to recognize the career and to celebrate the achievements of a good friend

of mine, Mark Creedon. Mark is retiring after a generation of service as the executive director of Catholic Family Services of Peel Dufferin. Mark will devote more time to himself and to his family as a retiree, beginning July 4, 2013.

For more than 38 years, Mark Creedon has dedicated himself to social work, helping families and youth in Peel region. His exceptional contribution has built countless careers among the fine people that he has trained and led. He has spawned many more leaders just like himself. His leadership has meant comfort, understanding and support for people and families in Peel facing crises, life and family challenges.

Last November, I presented Mark with the Queen's Diamond Jubilee Medal. Mark's award recognized his outstanding contributions to Mississauga and Brampton, and the organization-building that he did to make Catholic Family Services so essential to families in Peel region.

One of Mark's proudest moments came when the William G. Davis Centre opened to house a full suite of human service providers to serve us all in Mississauga and Brampton.

Live well, Mark. Ontario thanks you for your lifetime of work and service.

PASQUALE PALETTA

Mrs. Jane McKenna: On June 6, at its annual signature event, the Burlington Economic Development Corp. will formally induct Pasquale Paletta into Burlington's Business Hall of Fame as its 2013 Entrepreneur of the Year.

In doing so, he joins an esteemed group that includes: Harry Voortman of Voortman Cookies; Mark Chamberlain of Trivaris; Michael Lee-Chin of AIC Ltd./Portland Holdings; Michael DeGroote Sr. of Laidlaw/Republic; Ron Joyce of Tim Hortons; Murray Hogarth of Pioneer Petroleum; Ron Foxcroft of Fox40 International; and Reg Pollard of Pollard Windows.

Mr. Paletta came to Canada as an Italian immigrant after World War II and founded Paletta International. The company has grown from 10,000 square feet almost 50 years ago to more than 200,000 square feet today, and now exports to more than 17 countries worldwide.

The Paletta family has also developed thousands of residential units; constructed over half a million square feet of buildings; developed hundreds of acres of property for retail and employment; farmed thousands of acres; and most recently, branched out into film, media and entertainment.

The Paletta name is a familiar one to residents of my riding, and the family has always been a big part of the vitality of Burlington. We would like to have a huge congratulations out to Pasquale Paletta.

ESSEX COUNTY

Mr. Taras Natyshak: As always, it is a pleasure to rise in this House to talk about the extraordinary people

in Essex county doing extraordinary things. Essex county has been the venue for many of the significant historical events that have shaped Ontario and Canada. We know these events through the pages in our history books, but back home in my riding of Essex, the Maidstone Historical Society and the Kingsville Historical Park museum have taken the initiative to preserve and display the tangible artifacts of this history, and staged re-enactments to engage the community.

I want to thank the following members of our community for their dedication to telling our story. From the Kingsville Historical Park museum: Katherine Gunning, Lynda Lynch, Wayne Bagshaw, Larry Moynahan, Ilene Watt, Lyle Rhea, and Ed and Helen Buckler. As well, from the Maidstone Historical Society: Victoria Beaulieu, Elizabeth McInnis, Barb Townsend, Anita Goegabeur, Mary Helen St. Pierre, Mary Campeau and Elaine Klein. Mr. Speaker, as you can see, there are those in our province who go above and beyond to preserve history and the significance of the War of 1812 in founding this great country.

I want to thank them for those endeavours, and I encourage all members of this Legislature and the province of Ontario to visit Essex county and take in these important places, these important testaments to our history, and enjoy our shared history together.

1310

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Let me offer my special congratulations to the member from Hamilton East-Stoney Creek for his portrayal during the Battle of Stoney Creek. I'm just sucking up to avoid confusion over that last comment.

STOPGAP

Ms. Helena Jaczek: I would like to recognize the efforts of Luke Anderson, from my great riding of Oak Ridges-Markham. Luke and his co-worker, Michael Hopkins, started an organization in Stouffville called StopGap, which seeks to increase accessibility in local businesses.

StopGap is run by volunteers and funded entirely by donations. This evening, they will be having a fundraiser to support their efforts to increase and raise awareness about accessibility, one of our government's important priorities. Funds will go toward initiatives such as the community ramp project, where StopGap works with local volunteers to provide free portable, weatherproof and slip-resistant ramps to local businesses, including 16 already in Stouffville.

In addition to constructing ramps, StopGap also does presentations to students where Luke focuses on the theme of inclusivity and overcoming obstacles. Luke was paralyzed in a mountain biking accident 10 years ago, and uses the community ramp project as an example to teach students how to recognize a challenge in life and how to overcome it.

In fact, one grade 6 class that Luke visited was so inspired by his advocacy efforts that they created a picture

book called The Ramp Man, and \$3 of each sale goes toward StopGap.

Thank you, Luke and Michael, for working with local businesses and volunteers to create a community where every person can get where they want to go.

MARJORIE LIPKA

Mr. Bill Walker: I rise in the House today to pay respect to a long-time Sauble Beach resident. Marjorie Lipka passed away at the Grey Bruce Health Services hospital in Wiarton on Tuesday, May 14, at the age of 87.

Marj was a dynamo, a people person with charisma, a spring in her step and a sparkle in her eye. She was instrumental in just about every project in the community, including physician recruitment and the building of many major community projects: the Sauble Beach Community Centre, the Sauble Beach library, the United Church and, most recently, the Sauble Area Medical Clinic, of which she was the heart and soul of the Vision 2002 campaign. After 10 years of dogged determination by Marj and her team, the clinic is now open and serving the people of Sauble Beach and area.

She was a very determined and innovative volunteer. She influenced many people, members of council, and provincial and federal politicians with her charm, perogies and butter tarts. When Marj approached you and said, "Hey, sweetie, can you..." there was just no way to say no, Speaker.

As a result of her can-do, never-say-no attitude, she earned many nicknames for her extraordinary community work and fundraising initiatives, Mrs. Fundraiser, the Perogy Princess, and Energizer Bunny being the most popular ones.

Marjorie was a very worthy recipient of the Queen's Diamond Jubilee Medal in 2012, and it was my privilege to present her this medal, along with my federal colleague MP Larry Miller.

Marjorie is survived by her husband of 62 years, John, along with her children Carol Ann McMillan, Robert Lipka, Benjamin Lipka, Sharon Armstrong and Raymond Lipka, 15 grandchildren and 15 great-grandchildren.

I would like the House to join me in paying respect to Marjorie Lipka for her great dedication, hard work and generosity toward her community of Sauble Beach and area. Your legacy will live on, Marj.

HIGHWAY 427 EXTENSION

Mr. Steven Del Duca: It's a pleasure for me to take a moment today to update this House on the progress that's being made with respect to a remarkable project in my community of Vaughan, and that's the extension of Highway 427. It's a project that is extremely important for the residents and businesses in my community, and I'm happy to report that it is successfully moving forward.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, on Thursday, May 16, Premier Kathleen Wynne, along with Ministers Glen Murray and

Linda Jeffrey, visited Vaughan to announce the formal approval of the extension of Highway 427.

This 6.6-kilometre extension will run north from Highway 7 to Major Mackenzie Drive, with six lanes proposed from Highway 7 to Rutherford Road and an additional four lanes proposed from Rutherford to Major Mackenzie Drive. In addition to the extension, new interchanges at Langstaff Road, Rutherford Road and Major Mackenzie Drive will also be included in this project, as well as three new transitway stations.

This extension has been an extremely important objective for my neighbours and my community in Vaughan. A project of this size will bring thousands of jobs to York region, and will ensure that we will be able to continue moving goods and commuters more efficiently across the greater Toronto area.

I have certainly already begun to receive very positive feedback from residents in my community on this exciting announcement, and I'm pleased to see that our government remains committed to ensuring the successful completion of this project.

I want to personally thank everyone who has helped to make the 427 extension possible in my community, and I look forward to more progress being made on this project and others in the near future.

AL STRIKE

Mr. John O'Toole: I rise today to pay tribute to a respected citizen, friend and mentor, Al Strike, who passed away on May 23 at the age of 85.

Al was highly respected as the senior member of the law firm that has borne his family name, Strike, for the last three generations.

Al, affectionately known as "the Silver Fox," also found time to serve the community as a leader and volunteer. For more than 50 winters, Al built an outdoor ice rink on his front lawn for the neighbourhood kids to enjoy and play hockey.

Al brought the same generosity, enthusiasm and leadership to many bigger projects, including the Skate 88 campaign for the new arena complex in Bowmanville, and the Splash campaign for the Bowmanville indoor pool and fitness centre. More recently, he was a leader in the Valleys 2000 trail and fish ladder project.

Al Strike was a 60-year Rotarian, a founding member of the Bowmanville business improvement area, a member of the board of governors of Durham College, and a key fundraiser for the UOIT—University of Ontario Institute of Technology—and Valleys 2000.

Al was a member of the Ontario Trillium Foundation grant review team. He was named Ontario senior citizen of the year in 2005. He received the Queen's Diamond Jubilee Medal, and was honoured with a Rotarian Paul Harris Fellowship and a lifetime achievement award from the Clarington Board of Trade.

My deepest condolences to Anna, Al's best friend and wife of 62 years; and also their three sons, Ron, Bob and Dan; and all of their family's children and grandchildren.

His life was well lived, and he will be sadly missed but happily remembered.

I thank Al and Anna's three sons for their remarks at the funeral service the other day about their father's life, with the themes of celebration, 33 years, and hero.

VISITORS

Mr. Steven Del Duca: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Point of order from the member from Vaughan.

Mr. Steven Del Duca: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure for me to stand here today and have an opportunity, on a point of order, to recognize that we have some very special guests sitting with us in the members' east gallery.

We are joined today by the consul general from Italy, Mr. Tullio Guma, and his lovely wife. We are also joined by Michael Tibollo, the president of the National Congress of Italian-Canadians-Toronto District, and several other very important and friendly guests who were here today for the Italian flag-raising ceremony that took place on the front lawn just a few minutes ago.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Buon giorno.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

WORKPLACE SAFETY AND INSURANCE AMENDMENT ACT (PRESUMPTIONS FOR FIREFIGHTERS), 2013

LOI DE 2013 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LA SÉCURITÉ PROFESSIONNELLE ET L'ASSURANCE CONTRE LES ACCIDENTS DU TRAVAIL (PRÉSOMPTIONS POUR LES POMPIERS)

Mr. Del Duca moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 81, An Act to amend the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act, 1997 with respect to firefighters and certain related occupations / Projet de loi 81, Loi modifiant la Loi de 1997 sur la sécurité professionnelle et l'assurance contre les accidents du travail en ce qui concerne les pompiers et certaines professions connexes.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member for a short statement.

Mr. Steven Del Duca: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for a very, very short statement.

I'm very proud to stand in my place and introduce this legislation that will impact positively, I hope, a very important sector within our province. This particular bill seeks to amend the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act, 1997, to add to the presumptions with respect to occupa-

tional disease that apply to firefighters and to fire investigators.

Section 15.1 of this act is amended to include six additional occupational diseases that are presumed to be occupational diseases if diagnosed on or after January 1, 1980.

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STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

INJURED WORKERS' DAY

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Speaker, I rise in the Legislature today to recognize June 1 as Injured Workers' Day in the province of Ontario. We will observe in remembrance workers who have been killed or injured on the job. We will reflect on the effects that workplace injuries and fatalities have on workers' families, friends and communities.

People are our greatest assets. They must be properly trained, and we must strengthen our efforts to protect workers and their families. It reminds us that we need to do whatever it takes to prevent workplace fatalities, injuries and illnesses, and support their families and loved ones. We are making progress in our quest to make workplaces safer, working together with everyone who shares this goal.

Workplace injuries have decreased significantly over the last number of years. On construction sites, businesses, hospitals and schools, health and safety advocates are making workplaces safer. Ontario is now one of the safest places to work in Canada. Since 2003, we have lowered the rate of workplace injuries in this province significantly. The number of injuries in Ontario has gone down 30% since 2006.

But, Speaker, we need to do more. As we all know, one workplace injury, one workplace fatality, is one too many. We know that in many cases, the incidents that lead to injury or death are preventable or avoidable.

To help prevent injuries or fatalities, we have taken a strong, proactive approach to workplace health and safety. We have doubled the number of enforcement officers to make sure employers follow the rules. We have brought enforcement and prevention together under one roof, helping to make sure that injuries do not happen in the first place. We are developing the first-ever province-wide occupational safety strategy—with input from labour, employers, injured workers and community groups—to establish clear priorities and rules that will guide our work in the years ahead. We have made the new “Health and Safety at Work—’Prevention Starts Here’” poster mandatory in all workplaces, helping to ensure that workers know and understand their rights and responsibilities and the responsibilities of the employers and supervisors.

But we are not stopping there, Speaker. Together as a society, all of us must work to build a strong safety

culture, a culture of prevention in our province’s workplaces. Together, we can prevent workplace deaths and injuries. Families across this province all want their loved ones to come home safe and sound after a hard day’s work. As the Minister of Labour, I am committed to ensuring this goal becomes a reality for everyone.

While our goal is an injury-free workplace, we are also concerned and working to help those who do become injured. Our government has worked hard to protect the most vulnerable, so when workers get injured, they must be treated fairly and compassionately.

Speaker, since 2007, every year, the government has ensured that injured workers’ WSIB loss-of-earnings benefits have increased. In fact, for injured workers on partial disability benefits—these are people who have some earning capacity but are not able to fully return to work—there has been a total increase in benefits of more than 9.5% since 2007. By next year, this will reach 10%.

Speaker, we’re taking steps to ensure strong and stable WSIB not only for today’s injured workers but for future generations. A strong well-funded public workplace insurance for workers benefits all of us—injured workers, employers and the business community. A strong financial footing will also ensure that the WSIB remains an organization that treats those it is there to serve with fairness and compassion. This is not only what injured workers are owed; it is what they deserve.

Injured Workers’ Day is a day for all of us to stand and tell injured workers that they will not be forgotten. It is also a day for all of us—businesses, workers and government—to reconfirm our determination to eliminate workplace injuries and fatalities. It is a day for all of us to promise each other that we will continue to do what we can and what we must so that there is no longer a need for an Injured Workers’ Day.

ITALIAN HERITAGE MONTH

Hon. Mario Sergio: I rise to acknowledge June as Ontario’s third annual Italian Heritage Month. In 2010, this Legislature enacted the Italian Heritage Month Act, and I’m honoured to be here today to recognize the many significant contributions Italian Canadians have made to Ontario.

This June 2 marks the 67th anniversary of the country’s birth as a republic.

With approximately 900,000 strong or more, Italian Canadians are one of Ontario’s largest and longest-established immigrant communities.

In 1497, Giovanni Caboto landed on our eastern shores and became the second European to discover North America. We now have the John Cabot Trail on the east coast to commemorate his great discovery.

Beginning in the late 1800s, many Italians came to Canada looking to start a new life and began their careers in northern Ontario’s mining and forestry industries. They were instrumental in building Ontario’s railways and helped link many of our communities across the province. Their skills and remarkable work ethic are

renowned, and as cities grew, more immigrants came to Canada and gained valuable employment in the construction sector, building our homes, our public buildings and, in Toronto, our public transit system.

Italian Canadians continue to flourish in all sectors of our economy. Success has been seen from broadcasting to manufacturing, and from commercial ventures to politics.

Today Ontario, compared to every other province and territory in the country, has the largest population of Italian Canadians.

Italian Canadians have demonstrated that even when you fully participate in Canadian society, you can still maintain your ties to your culture and homeland. Italian Canadians continue to give back to their communities here in Ontario while remembering their roots. This province stands on these values and ideals. Ontario is built on the premise that cultural diversity strengthens our communities and our economy.

During the month of June, I encourage every Ontarian to enjoy the many events taking place in communities across the province celebrating the Italian culture. This is a time to reflect on the sacrifices made by earlier generations, while celebrating the achievements and contributions that Italian Canadians continue to make throughout our great province and across our country.

With that, allow me to welcome as well, as guests in our chamber today, our Consul General, Mr. Guma, and his lovely wife. We have the president of the Toronto district and Canadian congress as well, Mr. Michael Tibollo, his wife and members of the family; and another wonderful group from our community as well. They wanted to be here and join us in the celebration and the flag-raising ceremony. I thank you for your time.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): It is now time for responses.

INJURED WORKERS' DAY

Mr. Rick Nicholls: I rise today to mark the upcoming Injured Workers' Day on behalf of Tim Hudak and the Ontario PC caucus.

On June 1, 1983, over 3,000 injured workers, families and supporters came right here to Queen's Park to have their voices heard. Since 1983, injured workers and their allies have come together on June 1 to celebrate their achievements and to maintain pressure on governments.

This year marks the 30th anniversary of Injured Workers' Day. Since 1985, there has been a sharp decline in the number of worker injuries in Canada, and although we must celebrate progress, we must also acknowledge that there is still much more work to be done.

Each year, there are tens of thousands of workers who are injured or killed in Ontario. Many more incidents go unnoticed. It's more important to remember that these are people, not simply statistics. They're our parents, our sons, our daughters, extended family, friends, and even co-workers.

With this in mind, we confirm that the only acceptable number of worker injuries or fatalities in Ontario is zero. Until this goal is reached, many workers will gather at Queen's Park each year to challenge the status quo.

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It is our task as legislators to ensure that workers and employers are well-educated on safe working practices and that supports are there for the injured men and women who need them.

One of the most difficult tasks for many MPPs is hearing the stories of injured workers in their riding. To hear their personal struggle through the system and the pain that they have experienced is not easy.

Many of my colleagues in this Legislature come from professional backgrounds that put a great emphasis on workplace safety. In my past career in the private sector, I was responsible for human resource development and managed a great staff that oversaw the health and safety training of over 4,000 unionized workers.

It is important to remember that when we come together, we can accomplish great things. Together, we can overcome workplace injuries.

ITALIAN HERITAGE MONTH

Mr. Rob Leone: I'm pleased to rise in response to the minister responsible for seniors' statement on Italian Heritage Month and Italian Republic Day, I acknowledge, right after the member from Chatham-Kent-Essex, who I know has a very large Italian community in his part of Leamington. Certainly, there's lots of tomatoes there; that's how we know a lot of Italians are also nearby.

Mr. Speaker, Italy has a very rich history and culture. Anyone who has actually been to Italy would know how great the food, the art, the fashion and the passion for sport are. I have to say, particularly around the area of Vaughan, you have to like fast cars. These are the kinds of things that you'll note once you go to Italy.

The contributions that Italians have made to this world throughout its history have been significant. I remember when my grandfather passed away, the priest actually told us that he loved doing ceremonies for my family because he knew Italian Canadians to enjoy three very good things. Obviously, food and wine was one of them, but he loved what family meant to Italian Canadians. He also admired our devotion to the Roman Catholic faith. All of these are certainly part of what defines how so many people identify themselves. When they identify themselves as Italian Canadian, they share many of these great things.

Our province has been enriched by the numerous contributions Italian Canadians have made to this place, certainly since they first arrived here. I note with great interest that a lot of Italian Canadians arrived to Canada through Pier 21 in Halifax. They made that journey, like so many European new Canadians did, throughout the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s. I appreciate that we finally commemorated that location in Halifax as a destination

and put in a museum of immigration to commemorate the voyage that so many people took to come to this great land, this great province and this great country.

On behalf of the PC caucus, I want to thank and congratulate and say “Tanti auguri” to all the Italian Canadians in the province of Ontario.

INJURED WORKERS' DAY

Mr. Taras Natyshak: I'm pleased to rise today on behalf of the Ontario New Democratic Party and our leader, Andrea Horwath, to acknowledge Injured Workers' Day. I am afraid that it may be the only initiative that comes out of this House that actually provides any tangible point of reference for any action on behalf of this legislative body when it comes to addressing the issues that injured workers in the province of Ontario face. I would simply say to members, if you aren't receiving the same volume of calls as they relate to the failures of our workplace safety and insurance system that I am in my riding, then you aren't answering the phone. You aren't picking it up; you are avoiding it.

It is massive. It dominates the volume of calls that we receive in our office. It's indicative of a failure in that system, where there has been a focus on reducing the unfunded liability, which seems to dominate, again, the conversation when it comes to the system, at the expense of what the system used to be, which was a compensation system that acknowledged that when workers were hurt, injured or suffered from occupational disease, they got compensated. They were taken care of. We understood that it was important to take care of them and to ensure that they remained healthy and vibrant contributors to our society.

Now what has happened is that they've destroyed the system so terribly, workers aren't even inclined to indicate that they've been injured; they don't want to because of the stigma that's attached to being an injured worker in this province and the hurdles and loopholes that you have to climb through to get any action from our compensation system.

I say, I beg, I plead to the members in here—and I appreciate the minister and his final statement: It's a day that we promise each other to “continue to do what we can—and what we must”—what we must—do to provide a system that compensates, that doesn't degrade, doesn't demean injured workers; one that acknowledges that if we don't take steps immediately, we risk trying to compete with areas that do not promote health and safety, like Bangladesh, where they don't care. They didn't care. It was the corporate agenda that dominated the industry that garment workers, mainly women, suffered from, due to greed and at the expense of health and safety legislation. We have the Arthurs report, which should be acted upon in its entirety. I could speak for hours; I wish I did have the opportunity to.

PTSDs, precarious work, migrant workers who aren't afforded the same information and resources that we should be providing—we've got so much more work to

do, Mr. Speaker. I implore the minister to get on this file in a real, comprehensive way. He knows he has my full support if he endeavours to do that. Today is a day we remember and thank injured workers for their advocacy, but there's so much more we can do.

ITALIAN HERITAGE MONTH

Mr. Rosario Marchese: I was proud to be outside on the lawn celebrating the Italian Republic Day and witnessing the flag-raising ceremony. There were a lot of Italian Canadians out there and, indeed, many MPPs, including the Premier. That was a very good thing.

We have a lot of immigrants in this country, and Italians make up a big part of that immigration population. What I said outside, which I wanted to repeat inside, is that I believe that immigrants have made this country, and I believe that all immigrants are great Canadians, and they've made this province and this country strong.

While I have seen successive immigrants being attacked by those who settle, I believe that to be a profound mistake and profoundly wrong. We should end racism, wherever it is and whenever it happens; we should end discrimination, wherever it is and whenever it happens. We have seen that immigrants are good for this country, and I have been an active proponent of making sure that we end racism today—yesterday, if we could.

I congratulate the National Congress of Italian Canadians for organizing this event today and other events. They have a whole series of Italian Canadian celebratory events for Italian Heritage Month, and I hope that as many people as possible can take part in those celebrations.

Speaker, it was good to see you there as well, because while you said today is Italian Day, tomorrow will be another celebration of another immigrant group, and that is the way it should be, and that is who we are.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I thank all members for their statements.

PETITIONS

PHYSIOTHERAPY SERVICES

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas we understand that the Liberal government wants to cut back physiotherapy services for seniors in the province of Ontario by August 1, 2013. We rely on these services. We are against the cutbacks.”

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“We want the current level of physiotherapy services to be maintained for the benefit of our health. Please reconsider this ill-advised decision. This issue will influence our vote in the next provincial election.”

It's signed by a large number of people from my riding.

SERVICES FOR THE DEVELOPMENTALLY DISABLED

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: This is a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas agencies that support individuals with a developmental disability and their families have for several years (beginning in 2010) faced a decline in provincial funding for programs that support people with developmental and other related disabilities; and

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“Whereas because this level of provincial funding is far less than the rate of inflation and operational costs, and does not account for providing services to a growing and aging number of individuals with complex needs, developmental service agencies are being forced into deficit; and

“Whereas today over 30% of developmental service agencies are in deficit; and

“Whereas lowered provincial funding has resulted in agencies being forced to cut programs and services that enable people with a developmental disability to participate in their community and enjoy the best quality of life possible; and

“Whereas in some cases services once focused on community inclusion and quality of life for individuals have been reduced to a ‘custodial’ care arrangement; and

“Whereas lower provincial funding means a poorer quality of life for people with a developmental disability and their families and increasingly difficult working conditions for the direct care staff who support them; and

“Whereas there are thousands of people waiting for residential supports, day program supports and other programs province-wide;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“(1) To eliminate the deficits of developmental service agencies and provide adequate new funding to restore services and programs that have in effect been cut;

“(2) To protect existing services and supports by providing an overall increase in funding for agencies that is at least equal to inflationary costs that include among other operational costs, utilities, food and compensation increases to ensure staff retention;

“(3) To fund pay equity obligations for a predominantly female workforce;

“(4) To provide adequate new funding to agencies to ensure that the growing number of families on wait-lists have access to accommodation supports and day supports and services.”

I couldn’t agree more. I’m going to sign my name and give it to Lamiha, and she’ll deliver it to the table.

FAMILY SAFETY

Mr. Bob Delaney: I’m privileged to present this petition to the Ontario Legislative Assembly on the same day that it was my privilege to honour retiring Executive Director Mark Creedon from Catholic Family Services of

Peel-Dufferin, who is now with us. The petition reads as follows:

“Whereas the Safer Families Program is a successful partnership of Catholic Family Services Peel-Dufferin, Family Services of Peel and the Peel Children’s Aid Society (CAS), receives year-to-year funding from the Ontario Ministry of Children and Youth Services, and is a critical component of social services to families within the Peel community; and

“Whereas the intervention model for Safer Families currently operates with no waiting lists, an important consideration for families experiencing domestic violence and child protection concerns, as they require immediate access to service; and

“Whereas the Safer Families Program is aligned with Ontario’s child poverty agenda, is committed to preventing violence against women, and contributes to community capacity building to support child welfare delivery; and

“Whereas currently, Safer Families serves 14% of all domestic violence cases referred to Peel Children’s Aid Society and has the ability to double the number of cases it handles;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“That the government of Ontario adjust its funding to supply ongoing core funding rather than year-to-year funding, and realign funding to double the percentage of cases referred by the Peel Children’s Aid Society and served by the Safer Families Program.”

Speaker, I couldn’t agree more with this petition. I’m pleased to sign it and to send it to the table with page Jeffrey.

PHYSIOTHERAPY SERVICES

Mr. John O’Toole: I have a petition from my riding of Durham, and it’s on physiotherapy services. It reads as follows:

“Whereas the Ministry of Health is planning on eliminating OHIP-funded physiotherapy services currently provided to seniors in retirement homes—and changing the current provider of the service as of August 1st, 2013; and

“Whereas the Minister of Health has announced a total of \$33 million in physiotherapy funding, or \$550 per senior for 60,000 seniors, including those in retirement homes; and

“Whereas instead of the 100 to 150 visits per year a senior may receive now from their dedicated on-site OHIP physiotherapy staff, the change would mean a CCAC therapist would provide” only “5 to 10 visits on-site only to seniors who are bedridden or have an acute injury. All other ambulatory seniors would have to attend other community locations/clinics for physiotherapy and exercise off-site; and

“Whereas this change not only reduces the amount of money available, but also moves funds from the lowest-cost provider (OHIP physiotherapy providers)—\$12.20

per treatment) to the highest-cost provider (CCAC—\$120 per treatment); and

“Whereas current OHIP physiotherapy providers, who have been providing seniors with individualized treatments for over 48 years, will be delisted from OHIP by the government; and

“Whereas these services have been proven to help seniors improve in their activities of daily living, mobility, pain and fall risks;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“To review and reverse the decision to eliminate OHIP physiotherapy services to seniors in retirement homes, our most vulnerable population and most at risk for falls; and continue with the provision of at least 100 treatments per year with a mechanism to access an additional 50 treatments, if medically necessary, with the current low-cost OHIP physiotherapy providers”—at \$12.50.

I'm pleased to sign and support this petition and present it to Andréa, one of the pages.

CHILDREN'S AID SOCIETIES

Miss Monique Taylor: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“Whereas the Ontario government has approved a new funding formula to provide funding to the children's aid societies which are mandated by legislation to provide child protection services to Ontario's most vulnerable;

“Whereas due to this new formula the Children's Aid Society of Hamilton will be underfunded approximately \$4 million over the next three years with no changes to mandated child protection responsibilities;

“Whereas chronic underfunding to the Children's Aid Society of Hamilton will result in dismantling of support services and a loss of staff thereby jeopardizing the ability of the children's aid society to provide relevant services and protect Hamilton's children;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“That the Ontario government look critically at the funding provided to the child welfare sector and restore funding to the Children's Aid Society of Hamilton.”

I couldn't agree with this more. I will affix my name to it and send it to the Clerk with page Vanessa.

ONTARIO COLLEGE OF TRADES

Mrs. Julia Munro: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas Ontario's tradespeople are subject to stifling regulation and are compelled to pay membership fees to the unaccountable College of Trades;

“Whereas these fees are a tax grab that drives down the wages of skilled tradespeople;

“Whereas Ontario desperately needs a plan to solve our critical shortage of skilled tradespeople by encouraging our youth to enter the trades and attracting new tradespeople; and

“Whereas the latest policies from the Wynne government only aggravate the looming skilled trades shortage in Ontario;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“To immediately disband the College of Trades, cease imposing needless membership fees and enact policies to attract young Ontarians into skilled trade careers.”

As I am in agreement, I affix my signature and give it to page Edgar.

EMPLOYMENT PRACTICES

Mr. Michael Prue: I have a petition that reads as follows:

“Whereas servers and bartenders in Ontario earn \$8.90 an hour, far less than the minimum wage; and

“Whereas tips are given to servers and bartenders for good service and to supplement the lower wages they receive; and

“Whereas Ontario law allows for owners and managers to pocket a portion of servers' and bartenders' ... tips or total sales; and

“Whereas thousands of servers across the province have asked for this practice to stop;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“Support the swift passage of Bill 49, An Act to amend the Employment Standards Act with respect to tips and other gratuities and thereby end the practice of 'tip-outs' to management and owners.”

I am in agreement and will affix my signature thereto. The petition today is signed by many of the people who are here in the west gallery.

PHYSIOTHERAPY SERVICES

Mr. Ted Arnott: I too have a petition I wish to bring to the attention of the assembly this afternoon.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the Ministry of Health is planning on eliminating OHIP-funded physiotherapy services currently provided to seniors in retirement homes—and changing the current provider of the service as of August 1st, 2013; and

“Whereas the Minister of Health has announced a total of \$33 million in physiotherapy funding, or \$550 per senior for 60,000 seniors, including those in retirement homes; and

“Whereas instead of the 100 to 150 visits per year a senior may receive now from their dedicated on-site OHIP physiotherapy staff, the change would mean a CCAC therapist would provide 5 to 10 visits on-site only to seniors who are bedridden or have an acute injury. All other ambulatory seniors would have to attend other community locations/clinics for physiotherapy and exercise off-site; and

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“Whereas this change not only reduces the amount of money available, but also moves funds from the lowest-cost provider (OHIP physiotherapy providers—\$12.20 per treatment) to the highest-cost provider (CCAC—\$120 per treatment); and

“Whereas current OHIP physiotherapy providers, who have been providing seniors with individualized treatments for over 48 years, will be delisted from OHIP by the government; and

“Whereas these services have been proven to help seniors improve in their activities of daily living, mobility, pain and fall risks;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“To review and reverse the decision to eliminate OHIP physiotherapy services to seniors in retirement homes, our most vulnerable population and most at risk for falls; and continue with the provision of at least 100 treatments per year with a mechanism to access an additional 50 treatments, if medically necessary, with the current low-cost OHIP physiotherapy providers.”

My constituents talk about this as the “physiotherapy fiasco.” I have affixed my signature to it as well. Thank you very much, Jessica.

HEALTH CARE

M^{me} France Gélinas: I have this petition from the people of Foleyet, which is in the northern part of my riding. I invite everybody to visit Foleyet. It’s not very often that we hear about them, but they’re important people. It goes as follows:

“Whereas the residents of Foleyet and catchment area, including all residents living in the various lake areas, such as Twin Lakes, Ivanhoe Lake, Boulder Lake, Groundhog Lake, Horwood Lake, White Pine, Sewell Lake, Old Mill, surrounding the town of Foleyet, no longer have weekly on-site physician visits to the Foleyet nursing station; and

“Whereas the nurse practitioner requires on-site physician backup for at least a few hours weekly and that videoconferencing and transportation for seniors only, are not options;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“That the Ministry of Health immediately resume the weekly on-site services of a physician, to ensure that safe and proper health care is given to the residents of Foleyet and surrounding area.”

Every single resident of Foleyet and the surrounding area has signed this petition. We now have the complete list of their names. I support them, and will affix my name and ask Andréa to bring this petition to the Clerk.

AIR QUALITY

Mr. John O’Toole: I have thousands of petitions here, presented on behalf of my constituents in the riding of Durham. It reads as follows:

“Whereas collecting and restoring” older vintage vehicles honours Ontario’s automotive heritage while contributing to the economy through the purchase of goods and services, tourism, and support for special events; and

“Whereas the stringent application of emissions regulations for older cars equipped with newer engines can result in fines and additional expenses that discourage car collectors and restorers from pursuing their hobby; and

“Whereas newer engines installed by hobbyists in vehicles over 20 years old provide cleaner emissions than the original equipment; and

“Whereas car collectors typically use their vehicles only on an occasional basis, during four to five months of the year”—and certainly not when it’s raining;

“Therefore, be it resolved that the Ontario Legislature support Ontarians who collect and restore old vehicles by amending the appropriate laws and regulations to ensure vehicles over 20 years old and exempt from Drive Clean testing shall also be exempt from additional emissions requirements enforced by the Ministry of the Environment and governing the installation of newer engines into old cars and trucks.”

I’m pleased to sign and support this and present it to page Jack, one of the pages here.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

PROTECTING EMPLOYEES' TIPS ACT, 2013

LOI DE 2013 SUR LA PROTECTION DU POURBOIRE DES EMPLOYÉS

Mr. Prue moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 49, An Act to amend the Employment Standards Act, 2000 with respect to tips and other gratuities / Projet de loi 49, Loi modifiant la Loi de 2000 sur les normes d’emploi en ce qui concerne les pourboires et autres gratifications.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Pursuant to standing order 98, the member has 12 minutes for his presentation.

Mr. Michael Prue: It is indeed an honour for me to stand again to move this bill. This is the third time around. The first time the bill was—

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Third time’s the charm.

Mr. Michael Prue: Third time’s the charm.

The first time the bill was heard, it received unanimous support of the House and was sent to committee but never went any further. The second time the bill was entered into the House, and three days before it was to be debated, the House was prorogued. I’m not one to give up so I am back here again today, and perhaps today the third time is a charm.

The first time the bill was introduced there was a great deal of controversy. There were people in this House and

elsewhere who did not want to see the bill go forward. In fact, the labour minister of the day initially did not support the bill until a number of servers came forward and indicated to her at that time that this was a bill that desperately needed to be passed. There was some change of position in the Liberal government at that point. In fact, then Premier Dalton McGuinty came forward to support it as well.

There was a group that represents restaurants and the hotel-motel association, and they lobbied fiercely against the bill at that point. There were some members of this House who were initially opposed or at least were very wary of the bill. There were also, I should state, some people who confused tip-outs to management with the ordinary and good practice of servers sharing their tips with other people with whom they work, i.e., dishwashers, busers, bartenders and others who are all responsible for a good time or a good atmosphere in a restaurant.

But I think today we understand that a great deal better. The former Premier is still onside. The Minister of Labour has indicated to me that he is onside and in fact will speak in favour of the bill today. Other members of the cabinet have indicated to me that they are in favour. In fact, opposition members have told me that they are in favour. Even the Ontario Restaurant Hotel and Motel Association is now grudgingly supportive. I'd like to read their newsletter to their members of a couple of weeks ago. It reads in part as follows:

"The ORHMA's president and CEO, Tony Elenis, joined by VP of government relations Leslie Smejkal met with Michael Prue this past week. They brought with them industry operators in a meeting that proved to be productive in defining each side's views on the proposed gratuity bill. The hospitality industry explained the several complexities of gratuity systems while MPP Prue stayed on course that employers should not take tips from servers. We are glad to state here that his intent for a proposed legislation is not as arduous as it appears."

They then outlined a few things that they were hoping to see, should there be amendments, and concluded, "Once again, Michael Prue's focus is aimed at owners who take tips from servers and not included in any of the above scenarios. The ORHMA has been pleased with the understanding we received from Michael Prue and will continue to communicate with Prue on this subject." So the greatest opponents the last time are no longer opposing the bill.

This is the shortest bill, I think, in the history of this Legislature. It is one sentence long. The sentence reads, "No employer shall take any portion of an employee's tips or gratuities." That's it. That's the whole bill. It's pretty simple—

Mr. Rosario Marchese: It's too long.

Mr. Michael Prue: My colleague said that it's too long.

Today in Ontario it is against the law—and has been against the law, I think, probably for 100 years—for an employer to take any portion of an employee's wages as

a condition of their continuing employment, but tips are not covered. What this bill is intending to do is to make tips at the same level and under the same sanction as wages, so it will be against the law for an employer to ask at the end of the shift—at the end of the day of a hard-working person who worked all day and received tips—to take any portion of it.

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This will be a protection for employees who receive tips and gratuities. This is not limited to the restaurant industry but could be any person to whom a tip might regularly be given. It can include aestheticians. It can include hairdressers. It can include chamber people who work in hotels or car jockeys who bring cars around at casinos or hotels. It can include taxicab drivers. It can include literally anyone who might ordinarily get a tip.

Other provinces have already passed similar legislation since I first stood up. Prince Edward Island has passed a law. New Brunswick, Quebec and, most recently, Newfoundland and Labrador all include this protection for employees who might ordinarily receive a tip.

One might ask, why is this necessary? I will tell you, it's necessary because many employees live in fear. I have a letter which I'd like to read into the record—excuse me, an email which we received this morning. This is a person who was going to come to watch the debate, to do what any citizen is allowed to do in this entire province, was going to come here to watch the debate on this subject. That server wrote to me today, "It is with deep regret that I am withdrawing my name from the members' gallery list. A co-worker just called me and" heard the owner say "he was going to watch the live feed while in his office, and if any of us were in attendance, we would be fired.

"As is the case with many people trying to eke out a living from serving others ... I need this job, whether he gets to pocket thousands of my hard-earned tips every year, I have no choice."

This is the reality of what is out there, Mr. Speaker. What is happening today, and what people need to know, is that an employer can do many things. Employers in some restaurants keep all the tips; when you give a tip, the servers get none—not a penny of it. I can name you, but I won't, restaurants in this city where that happens every day.

In some places there's a tip-out jar. The employers are known to go and put their hands in the tip-out jar at the end of the night and take whatever they want. In some places, employers charge, and take out of the tips that are received, money for breakage, if anything is broken during the day, whether by the server or anyone else. They take money out for uniforms and require that the monies come out of the tips rather than out of the operating budget. They take money out of the tips for dine-and-dash, when a patron comes and eats and then leaves without paying. They take money out to pay for training which the employees are required to take and must pay for out of their own tip money.

But the most common of all, and I think probably the most egregious, is when employers take money out of

gross. They take a certain percentage of gross, and the average is 4% or 5%. What this means, on a 5% of gross, is that a server serves a meal for \$100 or a group of meals for \$100, and whether or not they get a tip, they are required to tip-out to management 5%, or \$5. So if somebody leaves no tip, they, in reality, have paid \$5 for the privilege of having served that meal. This is what happens in increasing numbers of restaurants in this province. When they give that money over, whether they got a tip or not, it is not required under tax law that the employer list that as money that he or she has earned. So, in fact, the employee is paying the employer, and the employer is not remitting any money at all to the government of Canada or the government of Ontario. It's free money. You have to wonder whether that's right.

A few other things I want to state within the last few minutes: People need to know that banquet halls do a practice which is called gratuity. If any of you have had sons or daughters marry and you go into the banquet hall or if you've gone to a function, at the bottom it says "gratuity," and it's usually 15% or 18%. That money you pay, but do you know that the employees, the people who actually serve the meals, don't get a single dime of that money, save and except in those places that are unionized? I have yet to find a single place in Ontario where the money is actually remitted to the servers. They get nothing. So that needs to end.

You have the problem in restaurants that have served meals but also have takeout, because employers will take 5% of gross on takeout meals. Now, you would have to know that most times when people come to a restaurant and take the meal away, they don't leave a tip. But the employee, who brings that meal to the front, is required to give 5% of gross, whatever that was, with the expectation that there will be no tip at all. You can wonder why some employees don't want to do it—because simply to take the meal in a plastic bag from the kitchen to the front counter costs them 5% of the wages they're going to make that day. That process needs to end.

I've already spoken a little bit about the taxes. In Quebec, their law says that every employee who receives tips is considered to get 8% of their tip actually delivered to them after they've shared with the other people who work with them. The Quebec government calculates it at 8%, and they pay tax on it. But not only do they pay tax on it, that goes against the wage that they actually make, so if they find themselves on employment insurance at some point, not only is the wage that they made calculated, but so is the tip money, so they have an opportunity to have made more money. If there's a pension available, it's more money that is pensionable as well. I think that's a good thing.

We need to do what is fair. We need to do what is fair for the employees and not allow owners to simply put that money in their pockets. It's not taxable and it's not fair that it's being taken from people who work so very hard.

I'd like to conclude, and I guess I don't have time to read all of it, with a woman who writes again saying that

her employer last week took \$52 from her tips. It was a horrible week. There wasn't enough staff. The money wasn't forthcoming because the service wasn't as good as she would have wanted it to be because there wasn't enough staff in the kitchen or at the bar, but in the end, the employer took \$52 out of her wage and sent her home, and there was nothing she could do because she so desperately needs the job.

I'm asking the members here to pass this bill. I'm especially asking the Minister of Labour, if this bill passes today and is sent to committee, to make sure it goes through committee. Make whatever amendment needs to be made, but make sure it goes through. Ontario should have the best labour laws. We should not be second to any. And if four other provinces can do it, so can we.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Let me just say this right off the top: I am pleased to rise in support of this member's bill. I'm pleased that the member has reintroduced this bill, and I thank him for advocacy and his passion on a very important issue.

This is an issue of fairness. Any one of us, when going to a restaurant or going to a barber or getting a tour at a tourism site, when we leave a tip we 100% expect that that tip will go to the person who's providing the service. I don't think there's any doubt in anybody's mind that we expect that tip to be shared with the management. I think that's the essence of this bill that we so very much support: to ensure that hard-working men and women, be it servers or barbers or hair stylists, tour guides or house-keeping staff, when we leave a tip for them, receive that tip or that tip goes to the staff. That's the essence of fairness and it's what we need to make sure that we continue with, and change our Employment Standards Act to ensure that any violation of that practice does not take place.

I had the opportunity to meet with the member from Beaches-East York to talk about this bill and how this bill can be improved. My staff has met with him as well. We look forward to continue working with him so that we can find areas of improvement. I agree with you, Mr. Prue, that we need to make sure that this bill gets to the committee where those improvements can be made.

Fairness is key. That's why I'm really proud to be part of a government that has increased the minimum wage in our province by 50%, from \$6.85 to \$10.25. We now have one of the highest minimum wages in the country. Speaker, as you may know, as stated in the budget, we are in the process of now setting up an advisory panel around minimum wage so that we can do some extensive consultations across the province with workers and with businesses to better understand how we can improve the manner in which we set minimum wage as well. That's the right thing to do, as what we are trying to do in this bill.

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I have had the opportunity to also speak with many stakeholders over the last little over 100 days since I

became the Minister of Labour to learn better as to what the industry is like and where such unfair practices may be taking place or where there are some practices taking place that are very legitimate. I think those are the kinds of things that we need to look at.

I want to raise three specific points. I think the member from Beaches—East York raised those points and I think he recognized that that's where there is room for improvement. There are three things I think we need to focus on when this bill goes to committee, if this bill goes to committee and is passed today.

One is the practice around tip-pooling or tip-sharing in many restaurants. I've been having those conversations when I'm out in my community in Ottawa Centre or other parts of the province where I'm asking servers, "Do you have a practice of tip-pooling or tip-sharing, and if you have that practice, how is it administered?" That's an important practice where servers and the staff themselves will share tips so that other members of the staff like the busers or the kitchen staff or bartenders are able to share from those tips. We need to make sure that that practice continues. We need to make sure that the legislation is written as such that we don't prohibit that particular practice, because it is an issue of fairness. Many servers will tell you that they very obviously, proudly and gladly, share their tips with other staff. Of course, we've got to make sure that management is not the one receiving any portion of it, but if there is a situation in a particular establishment where management supervises that or somehow enables that process, that in law that is accounted for.

The other important issue that I think we need to also work on and make sure there is clarification on is instances where a lot of businesses—restaurants, for example—are family-owned and family-run. I think we all know those businesses—they exist in all our communities—where the owner is also the cook or is part of the serving staff. In those types of circumstances we need to make sure that we don't exclude them. If they are very much part and parcel of their business in the regular operation of their business, we need to make sure that they could be able to participate in the tip-pooling or tip-sharing as well, as long as they are regular servers or cooks.

I have, for example, Little Italy and Chinatown in my riding, and every single restaurant in both those communities is family-run and family-owned. I think that's a circumstance that we need to have a very keen eye on to make sure that we're not creating any rules that will undermine family-owned small businesses.

The third point, the last point that I will raise, is in relation to unionized workplaces, where you may have a collective bargaining agreement. I've had the opportunity to speak with union representatives in Ottawa, in my home community, and in Toronto, to better understand how a lot of these agreements are structured. They do, of course, have provisions around wages for servers and also the service charge or the gratuity charge that MPP Prue was speaking of and how that may be split. I think

we may need to look at some transition provisions as to existing contracts that are in place, and when they are renegotiated, ensuring that there is no taking of service charges or gratuity charges by the management. We need to have an element of transition there.

Those are the three things that in my conversations and discussions with stakeholders—from the point of view of workers, the servers, and the industry—have come to light to me and that I think we have an opportunity to work on. I think the member from Beaches—East York has shown his willingness or indication that he's open to improving those. Otherwise, like I said, I support this bill. I encourage other members to vote in favour of this bill so we can have a more fulsome discussion about it in the committee and have it in law.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate? The member for Lennox, Addington, Frontenac, whatever.

Mr. Randy Hillier: Lanark—Frontenac—Lennox and Addington. Thank you, Speaker.

As the PC critic, I'm pleased to stand in support of the member for Beaches—East York's bill—Bill 49, I believe it is. I do hope that the assembly once again supports this bill, but this time, I hope it does get to committee and that we actually have those discussions and amendments to ensure that the intention of this bill is indeed going to be achieved at the end of the day.

I think both the member for Beaches—East York and the Minister of Labour have clearly articulated what some of the things are that we want to make sure don't happen with this bill—that we don't infringe unduly in those family-owned businesses, or the ability to share and pool and have tip-outs for other staff members in whatever business it may be, restaurants or others. So we are very supportive of it.

I want to look forward to this bill going to committee, having those discussions; and really, I do hope it doesn't fall into the abyss of private members' business, that so often happens in this House. I believe we have less than 4% of private members' bills that actually get passed by this House, actually make it to third reading and are proclaimed into law. With that, I do want to make sure that we protect those consensual agreements between staff for tip-outs and sharing.

One last thing I will say: It was disappointing to hear the member from Beaches—East York describe those terrible situations, egregious examples of people having their gratuities in essence stolen from them. My sons and daughter—many of them have been working in the restaurant industry for quite a while. Examples such as that I've never heard of in my area. I know many of my sons' and daughter's friends and they themselves have worked in the catering business as well, and although they're not unionized, they always got their share of the gratuity. It is disappointing to hear that those sorts of things happen here in Ontario, and we hope to put an end to it.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: I'm very proud and pleased to speak to this bill that the MPP for Beaches—East York is

now bringing for the third time. From the tenor of the debate here, it seems like we're going to be three times lucky in terms of getting this bill passed, but as the member said, let's make sure it just doesn't pass this second reading stage, but that it actually goes to the point where it becomes law in Ontario.

The member for Beaches—East York has worked very hard on this particular bill. As he said, it's not a big, complicated bill; it's a very straightforward, one-line bill. That has not prevented him from making sure that he's been out in the community, out around the province, in fact, talking to people who do rely on tips as part of their wages.

And let's not forget, tips are part of their wages. People who are in the restaurant business particularly, who are servers in restaurants, don't get minimum wage; they get less than minimum wage in acknowledgment that their earnings will be topped up with tips. Of course, those earnings are expected to be claimed by the Canada Revenue Agency as part of their wage package.

Nonetheless, we know that folks are facing serious problems with employers who have these unfair practices in place that basically take away their tip money. So I'm really proud that the member from Beaches—East York has once again stayed diligent on this file and brought this bill back to the Legislature once again for second reading debate.

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I have spent 10 years in the restaurant industry. When I was a younger woman, I spent 10 years in a number of different restaurants, earning my way through university, frankly, and I was never in a situation where tip-outs were occurring within the places where I worked. However, I did have friends who were in that situation and were charged everything from breakage fees to uniforms, as the member for Beaches—East York suggests.

Certainly, where I worked, we did do pooling of our tips to help out the people who weren't directly receiving tips—busers and kitchen staff and things like that—but were helping us to earn them. I learned from other friends, during the time when I was working in that industry, of the practices some of the employers were following in terms of basically—the member from Addington and Lennox described it—stealing the earnings of the people who earned those tips.

New Democrats are proud that this bill has come from one of our members. We're proud to be able to speak in favour of it, of course, and in favour of Michael's work, and congratulate him on that.

It's interesting how this issue has turned. Michael's diligence has led to the turning of this issue in the minds of many. In fact, the former Minister of Labour, when Michael first brought the bill forward, basically said—

Interjection: Beaches—East York.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: —sorry, the member for Beaches—East York—basically said there was nothing they could do about it, because tips were not wages. Now we have a Minister of Labour saying something quite different, and that's really because of the diligent work of the member for Beaches—East York.

It's interesting that the former Premier also came out in support of this bill. I hope we'll see unanimous support of this bill today—I expect we will—and I want to thank all members for taking the time to actually think about this carefully and realize that in Ontario it's not fair to have people's tips taken from them when they have earned them, and that the laws in this province can be changed and can be improved to protect the rights of workers. We're very proud to be able to do that today.

So I urge everyone in this chamber to support this bill and, once again, thank the member for Beaches—East York for being so diligent. I'm sure that everyone who earns a living in a way that is augmented through tips will be very, very pleased to see that once again we are taking this issue seriously and are hopefully on the edge of actually making a big difference for those folks here in Ontario.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Hon. Glen R. Murray: I also want to join in the support of this bill, and I particularly want to commend the member for Beaches—East York, because this has been a very solid commitment of his. He has worked very hard, pressing this point forward over and over again.

I want to also agree with the leader of the third party, who really is challenging this House to take this bill seriously and move it through. I think she's quite correct in doing that, and I'm hoping that all members will join in supporting this bill.

I think that probably all of us, at one point, if you didn't come from a family of extraordinary means, worked as a busboy or busgirl—I'm not sure if there's a busgirl.

Mr. Michael Prue: Bus person.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: Bus person. Thank you. Thanks very much.

I spent more time—it's not the worst job I've ever had in my life. The worst job I ever had in my life—I remember when our family business was lost in a recession, and it was a very hard time in our family. I was in the middle of college, and I had to work cleaning toilets in a public washroom at a shopping mall. I will tell you that when I finally got a waiting job after that, I was elated. At least I wasn't so smelly when I got on the bus going home. People would actually sit near me.

There are less glorious jobs, but it is a very tough job, and I think the member for Beaches—East York has pointed that out. This is a very hard job. It is a job done, in large numbers, by women particularly, and by people trying to get out of unemployment. It's often an entry-level job or a re-entry level job.

I'm glad the Minister of Labour made reference to the minimum wage and the importance of raising the minimum wage. I'm a big supporter of that. The greater value we put on people's labour, the more likely people are to work. The more you devalue people's labour, the less attractive it is.

These are often jobs that don't have pensions and all the range of benefits that quality, often unionized, jobs

get that give people of modest income some chance of security.

I do also want to say that this is a very tough industry to work in. Most restaurants fail. I've also had friends who came out of university who went out and started a restaurant. I want to be really clear, and I have no doubt the member for Beaches—East York would also share this view, which is that is a tough business to be in. Any of us in here who has run a small business, as I have—I started my business, re-launched it, in 2007 on the eve of the 2008 recession. I have an incredible sense of timing. We had 37 employees, and there were times when I and my two business partners would go for six months without a paycheque.

So I don't want it to be lost on people that people in the restaurant business, especially when it's families—that the owners are often in very difficult circumstances. Because it's easy to peg owners as sometimes being a problem, but there are lots of people who own their own business who have no guaranteed income, who have nothing guaranteed, and if the customers aren't coming in the door, they will have to pay all of their bills and their rent and their employees first. So there's a lot of economic stress, which often creates the kinds of tensions between small business owners and their employees when there is a scarcity of income. I think all of us would want to be compassionately concerned about that.

I think lots has been said about the importance of the legislation and the clarity. I would like to give some comfort to my friends in the third party. The Minister of Labour—since we both came into our new cabinet jobs at the same time—picked this issue up right away. So there have been many months of work done by the minister already. It's not to take credit away from the member from Beaches—East York; I think it was the clarity with which you raised the issues. So there already is an active interest on the government side of this House to look at some of the complexities and details. Because of the leadership of the Minister of Labour and the leadership of the MPP for Beaches—East York, on parallel tracks, there really should be no reason why this bill can't be passed, because a lot of the preparatory work has already been done by the government. We have that.

I'm always on House duty when we have private members' bills because it's my favourite time in the Legislature. I think we should be doing this all the time. We're a bunch of very bright, caring people who come here to make a difference. The member for Beaches—East York's face is on the wall of one of the schools in a low-income neighbourhood where he grew up. I think my constituents are extra proud that—if I can use his name briefly—Michael Prue comes from Regent Park. We're darn proud of you today, Michael.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Mr. Rick Nicholls: Listening to the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure, I am empathetic toward the fact that for small business owners it's all about risk and reward; and they take on a lot of risk

sometimes. I know the intent of this particular bill is not to punish but to reward those who, in fact, provide the excellent customer service to patrons who visit. So again it is my pleasure to rise today to speak to Bill 49, Protecting Employees' Tips Act.

I applaud the member from Beaches—East York for introducing this bill for a third time. The bill seeks to outlaw owners and managers from taking a cut of employees' tips. This process is called tipping out. Specifically, this bill seeks to amend the Employment Standards Act by adding the following line: "An employer shall not take any portion of an employee's tips or other gratuities."

People leave tips to reward the individual who served them, and those who contributed to the overall experience. Using the example of a restaurant, one would leave a tip for friendly customer service or a well-prepared meal. People would be shocked to discover that the money doesn't always end up in the pockets of those who served them. I think everyone in this House would agree that such a practice is just wrong.

That said, there are some groups that have taken issue with the vagueness of the bill. Here is a quote from the Toronto Star: "The Canadian Restaurant and Food-services Association opposes the bill as too 'simplistic' for an industry where small restaurant owners often wear 'many hats in one day' catering to customers and denies that tip-outs are a widespread problem." Now, I don't think I'd go that far. I do feel that this is a real problem in the industry that should be looked at, but I would agree that this bill is very broad in scope. In committee, I would hope that we can make some amendments to the bill to clarify some of its ambiguity.

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In many restaurants, employers pool tips and distribute them according to a set of rules agreed upon by employees. This is done to ensure fairness, as employees such as bartenders and chefs may not always be able to collect tips, but are still a valuable part of the customer service experience.

I have a daughter. Her name is Brooke. She is a singer-songwriter, but she works as a server in order to pay for her studio time. She has shared horror stories of having tips taken by restaurants. Additionally, she's even had to pay out of pocket for the old dine-and-dash customers. Her tips are affected by weather, as well. Slow times, fewer tips. Oh, but the owner still gets a percentage, even in busy times, because she works very, very hard to try to, in fact, make up for some of the poorer days when the weather has been lousy and there hasn't been the traffic flow.

Many restaurants pool tip money as a reserve fund to pay for those dine-and-dash losses. In those restaurants, no single employee is forced to pay the entirety of the bill; it spreads the damage across all employees, which benefits all involved. Would this bill outlaw such a practice? That's perhaps something that we will need to clarify in committee.

She relies on the money that she brings home from tips every shift. People in the hospitality industry live off

of their tips, and the practice of clawing back tips from employees is, again, just wrong.

In conclusion, I support this bill through second reading, but some changes will have to be made in committee before third reading. We want to ensure that we do not punish employers who act in good faith and enter arrangements with employees for the benefit of all, and that this bill specifically targets those who tip out to themselves for their own benefit.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Mr. Rosario Marchese: I support Bill 49. I think it is a clear bill, and it is, by and large, a very simple bill that's clear to most people. We believe that tip-outs to employers should be made illegal, and that's clear, but what we also believe is that servers should keep the tips that they earn and share them with the kitchen, the bar, hosting and busing staff, where appropriate. That's normally what happens, by and large.

Who is it that we are talking about? We're talking about young people—and, many times, older people—who work in the restaurant industry. Many of them are university students trying to make a little money to pay for the incredibly high tuition fees that they have to pay. Many of them are graduates—college students and university graduates—who are not finding work in their profession. This is an area where they look for work, and it isn't the \$8.90 per hour that makes them wealthy; it's the tips that bring them over the top to make a somewhat living-poor wage.

We talk about the fact that many of them who work in the restaurant industry are actors. I've met a lot of actors who work in that industry, because many of these actors are not gainfully employed. They need to be able to earn a good living, and the \$8.90 is a good start—it's not great—but the tips are what keep them afloat.

I understand the concerns the minister is raising, and he raised three. The first: We want to make sure that tip pooling continues to happen. I understand what he's saying. I agree with him, but in my view, the bill is quite clear. It says, "An employer shall not take any portion of an employee's tips...", which suggests to me that the others can and should be sharing it, but the employer can't, so his first worry, in my mind, is taken care of.

The second worry is that, where the owner is a cook, he wants to make sure that they share in the tips. I have no problem with that. If the owner is cooking, that's part of what we talk about in terms of servers sharing the tips with the kitchen. If the owner is in the kitchen, in my mind, they should be sharing that tip. If the minister wants to make that clear in the bill, I suppose that's something we can easily take care of.

The third one is the transition provision. I understand that. I suppose the industry needs to know in advance that this is coming. They might need some time, and that's not a big problem. I think we could live with that.

The weakness of the parliamentary system, I have to say, is that there are so many times when members introduce bills that are so eminently reasonable and they fail

each and every time. I say to myself, why does that have to happen? Why is it that we cannot change the parliamentary system to make it possible for bills where there is little conflict among the three parties—to move them along and pass them? If they are good bills, why is it that we have to kill them by process or by whatever political manoeuvring happens in this place? I think it's wrong. It doesn't matter which party does it. It's wrong when whatever party is involved in that practice, and I hope that ends. That's something, hopefully, we might have a discussion about.

Bill 49 is a good bill. I hope it doesn't die. I know it will pass today, but I hope it goes through committee quickly and we pass it quickly.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Mr. Jim McDonell: It's a pleasure to rise to speak to the member from Beaches—East York on his third attempt on this bill.

My daughter Marion works as a waiter in one of the local MacDonald stores, a grocer. She works very hard. For years, she has been going through university. She graduated just two weeks ago with her master's, a reason why I'm a little concerned about the regulation on the other side that would prevent her from getting a job in the next few months. She has worked hard, and she has relied on the tips for the time that she has been in university. I know from first-hand experience and listening to her—maybe not in her case it would be needed, but I can see that anywhere where the tips are taken away from the employees would certainly be a real loss.

A large portion of servers in Ontario fall into a lower minimum-wage category because of expected tips and gratuities. While for us, as customers, tips are often seen as a bonus, for the servers they form part and parcel of their salaries.

The Canada Revenue Agency has the right to assume the amount of tips and tax you accordingly, leaving the onus on the taxpayer to prove that the figures aren't right.

I believe that this state of affairs makes it very important for us to reiterate that every hard-working Ontarian is entitled to receive the fruits of their labour.

We must consider, however, that every employment arrangement is different.

A bill that prevents tipping out is supposed to address circumstances that hurt the employee—rather than a general ban.

Sometimes tips are pooled and distributed to non-service staff. This allows the cooks, the kitchen staff, the receptionists, busing staff and other key staff who are key to the enjoyment of one's meal out to be rewarded, and is an important source of income for them as well.

In other cases, a portion of the tips is used as an insurance fund against unforeseen circumstances such as dine-and-dash, and a blanket ban would affect them in that way as well.

What we must prevent is tipping out for the benefit of the employer alone. But the bill in its present form is vague, and it's very questionable if it will be able to

attain its intended results. For the benefit of all Ontarians, we must resolve these issues by giving the bill some greater depth, and I look forward to doing that at the committee level. We support the spirit of the bill and definitely look forward to the committee stage, where we hope concerns will be addressed to allow the hard work of the front-line workers to be rewarded.

In my final few seconds, I'd like to mention one of my constituents, a hard-working mother. In addition to her part-time job, she works at Dimitri's, one of our fine restaurants in Summerstown. Sherry Davis is a pleasure to work with and an example of what we see, generally, as people who work in restaurants. They're hard-working, generally run off their feet, but they always have time to come back to make sure you're looked after. Sherry volunteers whenever she has any free time. I was really quite surprised to see her working as much as she does at the local establishment.

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A bill like this looks after people like Sherry, who are hard-working and need our help. It makes sure they're treated right. It was a long time in coming. I understand it's the third time this bill has come forth, so I'm hoping it sees its way through. There are many people who will benefit from this bill—and not to cloud the issue; I trust that this is a small problem. In most cases, employers are very responsible, and this bill would not be necessary, but there's no question that there are always times when issues come about and there needs to be some general legislation that looks after the people who work so hard.

We support this bill. Again, I congratulate the member on his third time and hope that the third time, the goal will be achieved. Thank you, Speaker, and I look forward to seeing this in committee.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Mr. Taras Natyshak: I'm pleased to rise just briefly to add some favourable comments and my support, of course, to the member from Beaches—East York's third attempt at this really commonsensical bill.

From the outset, I'd like to say that I don't think any of us in here ever imagined prior to the member's introduction of the bill that this was a prevalent issue when it came to the tip-out process, or that it was something that actually affected so many servers and so many in the service industry. It has been my practice, as of learning about this bill, to actually ask servers whether they are forced to share or to give a portion of their tips to management. Lo and behold, Mr. Speaker, even as of Tuesday—I went out to a well-known establishment, one that is actually a chain restaurant here in Toronto, and found that the server actually was expected to share his portion of the tip. I couldn't believe that was right in front of me, right at the dinner table. But he also couldn't believe that there were steps being initiated at this Legislature to address that issue. He was quite thankful, as I am thankful and those who are here in support of the member's bill to actually address it once and for all are.

I am eternally hopeful, save any extenuating circumstances like prorogation or an election, that this bill will

see its way through the committee process with a measure of expediency that actually delivers the results that those in the industry are looking for, which is, ultimately, fairness. I don't think anyone who offers a tip to a server in good faith, based on the level of service that they've received, does so thinking that a portion of that tip would go to the boss, the manager, the owner. There's really no rationale there. The plates and the forks that we use are a given; the fact that you kept the lights on are a great thing—but I tip based on the level of service, and it's something that we could only imagine everyone else does.

I would also say that the timing has never been better for us to address this issue, because again, in terms of the prevalence of this being a problem, the more we see electronic transactions within the hospitality and restaurant industry, the more we're going to see this tipping-out process be a problem. When we used cash, servers were able to remove their portion of the tip and simply pay the bill. They don't ever get to handle that transaction any longer, and it makes it so that ultimately they're not in the process, and it makes them more vulnerable in terms of losing that percentage of the income.

For all of those wonderful reasons I've been articulating today, it is my hope that members of this assembly see the light and pass this bill through in a really quick way.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member for Beaches—East York, you have two minutes for a response.

Mr. Michael Prue: I would like to thank all of those who spoke today: the Minister of Labour; the member from Lanark—Frontenac—Lennox and Addington; the leader of the third party; the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure; and the members from Chatham—Kent—Essex, Trinity—Spadina and Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry and Essex. They all had very nice things to say. I'm glad to see that there appears again to be unanimity, or near unanimity, in this House. The servers of Ontario thank you as well.

This is an issue that affects literally tens of thousands, maybe 100,000 people, people who go out there to work hard every day, people who don't make a lot of money and rely on tips in order to feed themselves, their families, put themselves through school, pay the rent and everything else. Many of them live in fear because it's very easy in many industries to get fired if you're not in a unionized job.

As I read into the record earlier, a woman was threatened simply because—excuse me, a woman informed the server of what the boss had said, and the servers in that establishment were afraid to come to even watch today, lest they be seen here. This is the kind of intimidation that workers live under and the constant threat or fear that they may lose their job. Even if they don't lose their job, there are other tricks. If you complain about this, you can get fired, as one of the people who was here today got fired. You can have your shifts changed so you're no longer on the lucrative shifts on Friday and Saturday

nights, if you work in the bar but you find yourselves there on Monday afternoon.

This is one of the things that servers are afraid of. They need a law that protects them, a ministry that is able to investigate when bad things happen. They need that their tips be included in their wages for the purposes of pensions and everything else. We need it as fairness, and we also, as a government, need to make sure that owners just don't pocket the money and don't pay any taxes on it, because that too is unfair.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Thank you. We'll take the vote on this bill at the end of private members' business.

POPE JOHN PAUL II DAY ACT, 2013

LOI DE 2013 SUR LE JOUR DU PAPE JEAN-PAUL II

Ms. Damerla moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 72, An Act to proclaim Pope John Paul II Day / Projet de loi 72, Loi proclamant le Jour du Pape Jean-Paul II.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Pursuant to standing order 98, the member has 12 minutes for her presentation.

Ms. Dipika Damerla: Today it's an honour to bring forward Bill 72, An Act to proclaim Pope John Paul II Day in Ontario on April 2 of each year. First, I'd like to begin by acknowledging my college on the other side, the member for Newmarket–Aurora, who introduced Bill 25, also titled Pope John Paul II Day Act, 2009, which passed second reading on February 19 of that year. I want to thank him for his work, acknowledge that I build on him, and I'm honoured to have this opportunity to continue what the member from Newmarket–Aurora started.

I also want to thank and welcome Teresa Berezowski, who's here in the members' gallery, president of the Canadian-Polish Congress, as well as Matthew Samulewski, who's representing Polish Canadian youth.

Speaker, earlier this month, about two weeks ago to be more precise, I attended a memorial in my riding of Mississauga East–Cooksville for the victims of the Katyn massacre. The ceremony included a photo exhibit of the dead and a video that showcased the re-enactment of the massacre, a massacre in which over 20,000 Polish men and women—officers, landowners, lawyers, priests; people just like you and me—were killed at the hands of the Soviet secret police in 1940 for the crime of being Polish. They were killed under orders from Soviet leadership, including the highest level, Joseph Stalin himself. Watching the exhibits, it was hard not to ask how this could have happened? But happen it did, and as we all know too well, incidents like these have happened over and over again.

Katyn is but one example of the endless list of atrocities that human history is littered with. In fact, if we were to summarize the history of mankind, I believe it

would be the eternal conflict between man's astonishing capacity for evil and man's astonishing capacity for good. In this conflict, evil often wins, not because it's stronger or not because evil outnumbers the good; instead, evil often prevails because good people look the other way.

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But every once in a while, a good man or woman comes along and refuses to look the other way when faced with evil, when faced with wrong.

One such man was Pope John Paul II, a Pope who not only stood up to evil but inspired millions of people all over the world to do the same. One could argue that it was easy for a Pope with the full power of his office to have stood up to the totalitarian regimes of eastern Europe, but the fact is that long before Pope John Paul II stood up to tyranny, Karol Wojtyła, the man, was standing up for what was right. John Paul II was the Pope that he became because of what he had learned and lived through as Karol Wojtyła, the man.

Born in 1920 as Karol Józef Wojtyła in Poland, he lost his mother when he was eight years old, his brother when he was 12, and his father when he was 21. And so there he was, all of 21 years old and all alone in this world.

A poem that he wrote as a 19-year-old lamenting his mother's death poignantly expresses the loneliness and suffering of the future Pope:

Over this, your white grave
the flowers of life in white—
so many years without you—
how many have passed out of sight?

Young and alone, in a terrifying world, in a Poland occupied by Nazis, a Poland where unspeakable horror was being unleashed all around, Karol, already devout, sought further refuge from the suffering all around him in God.

It is alleged that Joseph Stalin once dismissively asked, "How many divisions does the Pope have?" In 1945, as the Soviet army rolled into Poland, the 25-year-old Karol was still at a seminary, but in time he would become the Pope who would have just the answer to Stalin's question.

As a young priest and later as he climbed up the church hierarchy, Karol lived and breathed the daily struggle that life in Communist Poland was, as he fought valiantly to keep the faith of his people alive, to keep his church alive against the might of the totalitarian state. He knew first-hand what it was like to live in a nation state where fear was a constant companion.

But it was these very experiences—the personal loneliness that comes from losing all those you love so early in life, living through the horror of the war years in Poland, and then living under a totalitarian Communist regime that was no friend of the church—that helped forge the Pope that he became: a steely Pope, one with enough steel to bring down the Communist regimes across Europe.

It was on October 16, 1978, that Karol Wojtyła made history by becoming the first Pope of Polish descent—and the first non-Italian since the 15th century. His first message to his fellow Polish people after becoming Pope was, “Be not afraid.” Stalin was dead by this time, but with this one phrase, John Paul II was well on his way to ending the totalitarian Communist regimes of Europe without a single military division.

The full assault on the grip of the totalitarian regimes of Poland came a year later when, in June 1979, Pope John Paul II travelled to Poland for the first time as Pope. It is said that the Communist brass had predicted that just a few old ladies would come out to meet this Pope. It turned out, as we all know, that millions upon millions came out—a trip where he inspired an entire nation to fear no more. He renewed amongst the Polish people their pride and their faith, and sparked the Solidarity movement. After that, there was no looking back in the fight against Communism.

When the Communist totalitarian states of Europe, starting with the events in Poland, finally fell in 1989, this remarkable man had definitively answered Stalin’s question by proving that military divisions are no match for faith and the ability to inspire people to fight for their freedom and dignity.

One of the most charismatic and popular Popes, as the leader of the Roman Catholic Church, the Pope served as the spiritual guide to over a billion Catholics. As a political leader, he was the catalyst to end Communist rule in his native Poland and eventually all of Europe. He won the hearts of millions around the world, people of all ages and all faiths; a Pope who did not wait for people to come to him but one who went out to meet the people. The most travelled Pope ever, he also became the first Pope ever to come to Canada, making three trips in all, including one to the Northwest Territories.

A remarkable man with many legacies—a Pope who brought a generation of young people to the Catholic faith, a Pope who sought personal redemption and reached out to the Jewish and Muslim faiths, and a Pope who brought down Communism. It would be fitting if this act could come into effect in 2014, as that will mark the 25th anniversary of the fall of Communism in eastern Europe, as well as the 25th anniversary of a democratic Poland, the country that gave the world this great man.

On a personal note, I want to say that I’m neither Catholic nor Polish, yet I’m bringing forward this bill, and there are two reasons. One is that my riding of Mississauga East—Cooksville, a very multicultural riding, has a very large Catholic population, and I believe that it is my duty to bring forward a bill that is meaningful to my constituents. But there is another reason. The truth is that the true mark of greatness in a man is his universal appeal, a charisma that allows each of us to see a little bit of ourselves reflected.

John Paul II’s role in bringing down Communism has a particular resonance for me and millions of Indians who were either born during the Cold War era or came of age during that time. That is because I grew up in an India

that during the Cold War years was firmly under the Soviet influence. It was an India without the totalitarianism of the Communist bloc but with all of the excesses of socialism that came with being part of the Russian sphere, an excess that punitively stunted the economic growth of a nation, condemned millions to needless poverty, enriched a select few and, most of all, killed that most precious of human qualities: ingenuity and entrepreneurship. It is no accident that the economic liberalization of India started in earnest in 1991, the same year that the USSR was dissolved. The winds of change that swept through the USSR blew open the door to a steady but slow path to prosperity for India.

So there you have it, Speaker: a man with universal appeal, a Pope and a man who was one of the giants of the 20th century. It would be fitting, given his many legacies in this House, if this House would support the proclamation of April 2 as Pope John Paul II Day in Ontario. And finally, the true meaning of this day, I believe, would be if on every April 2, we can recommit that when we are tapped on the shoulder to confront evil—and believe me, each of us will be—we will have the courage to confront it.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Mrs. Jane McKenna: Thank you to the member from Mississauga East—Cooksville for bringing forward Bill 72, An Act to proclaim Pope John Paul II Day, a bill I am very proud to support.

Pope John Paul II was a Pope with very personal global reach who managed to connect with people around the world in very specific and life-changing ways. He visited Ontario twice, once in 1984 and in 2002, and both were historic occasions.

As the first Polish Pope ever and the first non-Italian Pope in four and a half centuries, it was probably a given that Pope John Paul II would be an unconventional figure, but few could have predicted how he would have come to be an almost otherworldly icon, even to those who considered themselves above that kind of thinking. He navigated a world of black and white political beliefs, but he also helped to usher in a new world, from his committed support of anti-Communist forces in his homeland of Poland and eastern Europe, through the awakening of courage and freedom that began 25 years ago in central and eastern Europe.

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Pope John Paul II shaped world events even as he was shaped by them. As a young man growing up in Holocaust-era Poland, he saw first-hand humankind’s capacity for inhumanity. As Pope, he would work to repair the damaged relationships between Catholics and Jews, and to speak out against anti-Semitism. His willingness to offer unvarnished apology again and again was famous, and it was matched by a profound and moving capacity for forgiveness.

In May 1981, while in Saint Peter’s Square during his weekly general audience, Pope John Paul II was shot by a would-be assassin. But more indelible than that memory

is Pope John Paul's forgiveness from his hospital bed of his would-be assassin, a man he visited in prison and whose release and pardon he later worked to secure.

We can only imagine the remarkable path this man travelled through his world, but what we do know with certainty is that he touched the world's people deeply. In a world divided by despair and poverty, he stood as a beacon of hope, and even as he spoke of a world beyond our own, he urged us to take action; to take responsibility for our thoughts and deeds, to seize the incredible potential of the present moment.

"The future," he reminds us, "starts today, not tomorrow."

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: It's an absolute pleasure, privilege and honour to rise today in the House to speak in favour of this bill. I remember when the bill was first tabled, back in 2009, by the member from Newmarket–Aurora, who is here as well, and then unfortunately was lost due to prorogation. Now that the member from Mississauga East–Cootsville has re-tabled it, we hopefully will have a chance to see this move its way through committee and finally be passed into law, in time for next year. That's all of our hope, and I believe we have pretty well unanimous consent on that motion.

Let's talk about His Holiness, and let's talk about his impact. I remember, back in 2002, World Youth Day in my riding of Parkdale–High Park, not because it's largely Polish or largely Roman Catholic, but because it was an unusual experience, first of all, to have a Pope come to Toronto, or to Canada at all. He was the very first Pope ever to come to Canada, and he came three times, starting in 1984.

When he spoke at World Youth Day, literally hundreds of thousands listened. When he came to our street, Roncesvalles—closed the street down, did a prayer and did a mass in our very community—it was truly an honour. There is a statue to the Pope right on Roncesvalles, and there is not a week that goes by when there are not flowers and bouquets, and candles lit in front of that statue.

Mr. Speaker, you've heard it elucidated by a number of people around this House, but here's why I think he was so profound in his impression upon all of us and upon the world: He was the very first Pope to reach out across faith boundaries to members of other faiths.

He actually met with His Holiness the Dalai Lama—I also have a number of Tibetans in my community. He met with him eight times, and he actually presided over a mass, praying along with the Tibetan people, because both faced similar adversaries in communist and totalitarian states. So he felt that connection very strongly.

He was the first Pope to set foot in a mosque. He went and worshipped, and he apologized for any breaches between those two faiths. He was the first Pope to set foot in a synagogue in Rome, and again offer some apologies for some of the anti-Semitism that had come from Christian quarters over the centuries. And yes, he

was the first Polish Pope—the first non-Italian Pope since the 1500s, and Polish—and he was the centre of resistance.

There's a great quote about the Pope that I love, and let me attribute it correctly. Actually, it doesn't have attribution; this is just off the CBC website. Some chroniclers described him as "one part James Bond and" three "parts John the Baptist." I like that. Why one part James Bond? Because—this is an attributed quote—Timothy Garton Ash, an Oxford University historian, said, "Without the Pope, no Solidarity. Without Solidarity, no Gorbachev. Without Gorbachev, no fall of communism." That shows the impact of this one man and his effect upon the world.

Having Polish relatives and having many Poles in my community—I'm talking about those who actually lived through that era in Poland; they can attest, and attest with great passion, with tears in their eyes, whether they're faith people, whether they're Roman Catholics, whether they partake in church in any way, shape or form, or not—but they remember his trip to Poland. They remember that this was a changing point, a lightning rod for resistance to that totalitarian regime in the USSR.

They remember the churches as centres of that resistance. As a United Church minister myself, I've long argued for the churches as centres of resistance, centres to fight against injustice. And that's what he did. That's what those churches became, not just in Poland, but throughout eastern Europe.

It has been talked about that the Communist regime of the day didn't really expect that many people to show up when he came to town. They didn't know the extent of religious feeling and passion that existed. Lo and behold, that was the catalyst to show them and to show the world just how much faith was alive despite years of Communist dictatorship in those countries. Despite years of Communist dictatorship, faith was alive, and boy, did it catch fire. It caught fire all across eastern Europe. Why? Because of that one man.

What else can we say about him? He spoke out against apartheid. In fact, let's look at the Pope in his own words. He said, condemning apartheid at the International Court of Justice in 1985, that "no system of apartheid or separate development will ever be acceptable as a model for the relations between peoples or races."

He was a pacifist. Here's what he said about war to diplomats—and this was not a popular stance, by the way—on January 13, 2003, as the Iraq war loomed: "No to war! War is not always inevitable. It is," he said, "always a defeat for humanity." Those are brave words. Those were not popular words at the time; and those were words that really resounded around the world in contradiction to governments of the day.

He also redefined the papacy, quite frankly, in a very new and different way. This is how he did it. He said this—again, I'm quoting him: "The Pope cannot remain a prisoner of the Vatican. I want to go to everybody ... from the nomads of the steppes to the monks and nuns in their convents ... I want to cross the threshold of every

home." Again, a difference, a break with the past—a total break with the past in many ways.

Called "the people's Pope," he received the Presidential Medal of Freedom from President George Bush in 2004, despite his opposition to the war, I might add.

Certainly, in every social justice stance that he took we can see the results. In every place he stood over and against power, speaking truth to power, he and his ideas won and power lost. That's a significant statement to say about anyone. This was a man who used his pulpit and his position to change the world, quite literally.

So in my riding, we know him as the beloved one of the Polish people. But truly, when we think about Pope John Paul II, we think about someone who hopefully this bill—hopefully being passed this time—will truly herald as a beloved man of the people—all people of all faiths and all people everywhere around the world. He was the first Pope to do that.

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Certainly, for youth, I'll say this, in the Catholic Church he was again a call to not only resistance to evil, but a call to impassioned engagement for social justice. World Youth Days and World Days of Prayer, which he also instituted, became worldwide phenomena for the entire Christian world. This galvanized youth in a new way. Youth that hadn't stepped foot in church in a while became youth who were not only ready to step foot in church but ready to go out and carry the gospel to all the corners of the Earth. That, he did as well.

As a Christian myself, I herald him for that, and for the true meaning of the gospel, which is to go into all of the corners of the world and to make a difference, to actually do what Jesus said: to visit those in prison, which he did; to forgive those who harm you, which he did—you heard how even his potential assassin; to go where they are hungry and to feed them, which he did; and to go where there is comfort needed, which he did.

For all of these reasons—and, my goodness, when you elucidate them they are astounding. This is the reason we need to honour him.

Again I thank the member from Mississauga East-Cootsville. I thank the member from Newmarket-Aurora, who originally tabled the bill. I know it also is being heard federally at Parliament Hill. I think it has passed second reading there. So my hope is here: that we can come together, that we can move it through committee, that we can bring it back and that we can pass this before, certainly, another year moves in and moves out, and that we can make this man of the people a man for all people, with a day to commemorate just exactly that. Thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Hon. John Milloy: It's a pleasure for me to rise in support of my colleague's bill that we're debating this afternoon. I should say at the outset that there's a great interest on this side of the Legislature and, I think, on all sides to speak on it, so I will speak rather briefly so I can allow other colleagues to stand up.

I do want to begin by congratulating my colleague from Mississauga East-Cootsville. I have to tell you, she's not only a very hard-working member; she's very, very proud of her community. She's proud of the fact that it has a very large Polish community. She feels very privileged to represent that community. We welcome, I know, representatives from the Canadian Polish Congress who are with us.

I actually can identify with her in representing a large Polish community. Although I represent Kitchener Centre, which is known as the largest, I think, German community in the province, people may be surprised to know that when you look at the census data, the second-largest group there is the Polish community, and I've had many, many interactions with them.

I'm also a proud member of St. Anthony Daniel Catholic church; born and raised a practising Catholic. So in all that context I stand here today to echo the words of praise for Pope John Paul II, for the legacy that he has left us, for his vision and leadership. I congratulate other colleagues who have spoken so eloquently of all that he has done for this world, not just the Catholic community, but in terms of very, very turbulent times, particularly in eastern Europe and the leadership that he chose.

I remember, on a personal level, if you'll allow me, his first visit to Canada. When he came to Ottawa, I was a young student and joining the thousands of people on the roadway to welcome this very, very exciting new Pope. I had the privilege in later years of actually working as an assistant, an aide, to then-Prime Minister Chrétien, to attend the World Youth Days mass as part of the Prime Minister's entourage, and again to see the literally tens of thousands of people who had come out to honour this extraordinary individual.

On a personal note, I found out a number of years later that there was a young woman who was an emergency physician, who had been recruited to actually serve as the personal physician to the Pope in case something would ever happen. She was on stage. So I was in the audience. She was on stage. Neither of us knew we were there, but a number of years later we met and began to date and we eventually got married. So it gave us something to talk about early on in our relationship: about how the Pope had been someone to bring us together.

But back to the original point, Mr. Speaker, I think it's very, very important that we have days to honour such outstanding individuals as this, as Pope John Paul II. I want to congratulate my colleague for taking this initiative for reflecting, I know, the pride that she has in her community, and I urge all members to support this very, very important bill.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Mr. Jim McDonell: I'm proud to rise to speak to Bill 72 to commemorate the great work of John Paul II.

Pope John Paul II, throughout his long pontificate, embodied many values that we share as Canadians and we admire. He was the first non-Italian Pope in more than four centuries and dedicated his life to bringing

people of faith together across the world. In doing so, he visited 129 countries and covered more than a million miles on official business.

I remember the time around his election, and the great time of uncertainty. His predecessor, Pope John Paul I, had just been elected and only had served just a little over 30 days. I remember coming to work that day and hearing about it, and just a lot of confusion because there was still talk about the former Pope who had passed away—certainly not what we would normally expect.

A great hope had surrounded John Paul I's papacy, and the world was shocked on his passing. The Catholic world was then called again together to elect a new Pope, and he took the name to honour the previous Pope whose life was cut so short.

The message and legacy of Pope John Paul II inspire us to embody the highest moral values, such as love for thy neighbour, remaining steadfast and just in our beliefs and to embrace those who are different from us in fellowship.

We will never know and can only speculate just what impact he had on the dismantling of the Iron Curtain. But we know more than that he transcended religious boundaries to fight against the wrongs of our world: dictatorships, communism, poverty, war, and he made a huge difference in places that were previously off limits to a Pope.

He travelled; he knew no bounds. Where there was trouble, he was there. He talked to and he brought the heads of state together. He certainly instilled a large pride in the Catholic world.

His impact on history has been great, and the world benefited from the great work of this great man. But we know when we look back into Ontario today, and we see how his message offers excellent guidance for the years ahead—the province is more diverse than ever, and our economic development rests upon bringing the best and brightest from across the globe. We will find in Ontario not just opportunities, but a welcoming environment.

In my own riding of Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry, all communities and faiths have worked together for generations to build a better place that we call home. Today, we are welcoming a growing number of new Canadians who have chosen to make my riding of Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry their home.

Establishing a commemorative day in honour of Pope John Paul II will place his legacy and his message more firmly in the minds of Ontarians.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Mrs. Laura Albanese: It's really a pleasure to rise in support of Bill 72, An Act to proclaim Pope John Paul II Day. I have supported this in the past when it was first presented.

Many people, or many members, have already expressed the charismatic personality that Pope John Paul II had and how he engaged in a dialogue with representatives of other world religions, convening them to the Vatican, convening them often even to the city of Assisi, the birthplace of St. Francis, and praying with them.

Yes, he was the most travelled Pope in history; he travelled tirelessly across the globe. He was the first non-Italian Pope. He was loved. He was loved not only by Polish people and by Italian people, but by people from all over the world.

He travelled to 129 countries, and many times he would address the crowd—the enormous crowds—in their own language, and this made him very open, and people thought he was very friendly.

He was a great proponent of human rights and world peace, as we know. I think it is fitting that we proclaim a day in Ontario that recognizes Pope John Paul II and his legacy of promoting dialogue, co-operation and understanding among different cultures. That's what our province is about as well.

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From a personal point of view, as a former broadcaster and journalist, I had the opportunity to follow the Pope's first visit to Toronto during his cross-Canada tour in 1984, and I remember this joyous, enormous crowd that came to greet him at Ontario Place.

Then, Ontario Place was again the meeting place for the celebrations of World Youth Day in 2002. We had 750,000 young people who came here to Toronto from all over the world. It was amazing to see how they were singing the praises of this aging religious leader and were following him. It was really moving to interview quite a number of them.

As a field producer and television anchor, I was in Rome in 1999, when Pope John Paul II declared the beatification of Padre Pio, a popular Franciscan brother and priest who was later proclaimed a saint.

As chance would have it, I was also in Rome that fateful day, April 2, 2005, when he died. I can say that when the news of his death was made public, there was a palpable feeling of mourning, of sadness, of loss in the Eternal City. Between April 2 and April 8, there were over three million pilgrims who came to pay homage to this spiritual leader.

On the day and at the time of his funeral, a surreal silence fell upon the capital of Italy. If anyone has ever been, they would know there's lots of traffic; it's a bustling city. Everything came to a standstill. The streets were deserted. Kids weren't even playing in the playgrounds. Everybody was really mourning the loss of a leader. I had the feeling that it was really a loss for the whole world.

That's why today it is my great privilege and honour to support this bill, together with my colleagues here. I think it's fitting that we honour the legacy of this great world spiritual leader.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Mr. Jerry J. Ouellette: *Remarks in Polish.*

Habemus Papam, which is, "We have a Pope."

In an ever-increasingly secular society, I thought it was important, to start, to give some history of the footsteps where John Paul II started or began and where the history of the Pope comes from. I'm going to quote the book of Matthew, the King James Version. Matthew

4:19 specifically states, "And he saith unto them, Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men." For those of us who don't realize it, each of the Popes carried a ring of a fisherman that had their papal name embedded in it. Every time a Pope passed on, the ring was destroyed. The reason for that, historically, was because it showed that no documents could be backdated after the passing of a Pope.

If you go on to Matthew 16:18, Christ says to Simon Peter, "And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." That was the first Pope, Speaker, for those who don't realize it, and it was those footsteps that John Paul II followed.

We've heard many aspects of his life. Some of the things I wasn't sure I heard mentioned were the two doctorates he had, one in theology and the other in philosophy. As well, we heard about him visiting 129 countries. He was 58 years old when he began, and he spoke several languages. Yes, it was mentioned about praying with the Dalai Lama, and about being the first Pope in a synagogue as well as in a mosque, which was something new for a Pope. This was very typical of his manner and everything else that had taken place.

Also, when we go back to the foundations of the very first Pope, Simon Peter, the very first Pope, was said to have been crucified under the Emperor Nero Augustus Caesar. It is traditionally held that Peter was crucified upside down at his own request since he saw himself as unworthy to be crucified in the same way as Jesus Christ was.

There are many aspects of John Paul II that members have mentioned. I know that our caucus is wholeheartedly supporting and thanking the member, Mr. Klees, and the member opposite for bringing this once again. I believe you'll find very good support throughout this chamber.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Mr. Bob Delaney: I think Pope John Paul II, in the hereafter in heaven, would take pride in the fact that this bill is presented for second reading by a Hindu member of the Ontario Legislature. It says something about our Ontario, as it does about the legacy of the Pope. I have to join in acknowledging my colleague from Newmarket-Aurora for his efforts on behalf of this bill in a previous Parliament.

Pope John Paul II was one of the most travelled Popes in history, visiting 129 countries during his pontificate. He beatified 1,340 people and canonized 483 saints—more than the combined total of his predecessors for the preceding five centuries.

One thing that's not known about Pope John Paul, which is, as the Archbishop of Krakow, he had visited Toronto in the 1970s. There was then and remains today a Polish restaurant near the corner of Roncesvalles and Queen Street where the future Pope had dinner.

Pope John Paul was, of course, the first non-Italian Pope since Adrian VI in 1523 and was also the second longest-serving Pope.

I think it's only fair, just and right, and it pays tribute to a great man who changed the world—left it a markedly better place—that we all come together in this Legislature to support this bill and proclaim Pope John Paul II Day.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Mr. John O'Toole: I want to commend the member from Mississauga East—Cooksville for bringing this issue forward in respect to the members of her community. She spoke very passionately and kindly about Pope John Paul. My colleague from Oshawa brought a completely different perspective to it, which was good, because a lot of us are repeating many of the same things.

I'd just start by saying that I think we all generally agree and admired Pope John Paul, and I'll tell you why. I can recall back—I was trying to recall what date—in 1984 or 1985, when he came to Downsview at the airport. My two children were involved in the thing. As my generation tends to keep memorabilia stuff, they still have the little yellow hats and scarves they wore as part of the large choir to welcome the Pope to Downsview.

It's important to put a bit of history around it too in the brief time. He was very well educated. He went to Jagiellonian University in 1938, where he showed an interest in theatre and poetry. The school was closed the next year by the Nazi troops from Germany who occupied Poland. Wanting to become a priest, John Paul began studying in a secret seminary run by the Archbishop of Krakow after World War II. He finished his religious studies at the Krakow seminary. He was ordained in 1946, became Bishop of Ombi in 1958 and became the Archbishop of Krakow in 1964. He was made a cardinal by Pope Paul VI in 1967. In 1978—and, as someone said, he was 58 years old—he became the first non-Italian Pope in many, many years.

He began to travel widely, as has been said by many. His reign was marked by his steadfast opposition to Communism, and he was often credited as one of the forces that contributed to the collapse in eastern Europe in 1990. John Paul died in 2005, as been said.

Other things that I found interesting: In 1942, he joined the UNIA, an underground organization made up of Catholic Poles that helped Jews find refuge from the Nazis, while studying for the priesthood at an underground seminary. He was a spiritual inspiration behind the withdrawal of Communist forces. At the very end—near the end—in 1989, he met with Mikhail Gorbachev and expressed his admiration for him.

1530

He was a very inclusive person, a very intelligent person, very interesting, articulate, and artistic to the extent of life. In that respect, I think all persons of all faiths or respect for humanity would have some time for him, along with other important dignitaries like Mahatma Gandhi and people who are from other generations of our life. I think it's a good lesson for all of us once in a while.

This morning, the Ontario Prayer Breakfast was held at the Royal York. Famous hockey player Paul

Henderson was the speaker. It was inspirational because there were people from all backgrounds, all celebrating faith. Faith is important to every single person. O ye of little faith: If you have no faith, you have no hope.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Ms. Helena Jaczek: I'm just delighted to rise in support of our colleague's bill to proclaim Pope John Paul II Day.

I'm going to concentrate on the Polishness of the Pope. Having a Polish father and so many relatives in Poland, I well remember that feeling of excitement and pride that finally it was a Polish Pope. My family is not particularly religious, but that sense of: "Finally we are recognized as a country, as a country that has produced such an amazingly talented and inspirational individual."

As our colleague has said, Pope John Paul II was born Karol Józef Wojtyla in Wadowice, Poland. He studied at the Jagiellonian University in Krakow, one of the foremost European universities. It was there that he learned those 12 foreign languages, nine of which he used so often to communicate so well. If he wasn't speaking your language, perhaps all you needed to do was look at his smile: a beatific smile, one so full of love for humanity.

One of the stories I liked about him so much was, when he was at that seminary in Stalinist Poland, it was against protocol for priests to travel with groups of students. So what his students would do when they would go hiking and bicycling—he was, as I think we all know, a very athletic young man—they would call him "wujek," which means "uncle"—in other words, to somewhat camouflage the fact that he was a priest.

As has been said, the Solidarity movement in Poland was simply inspired by him. The quote that our colleague gave about "Do not be afraid": When he used that phrase in Poland, he actually said, the full quote is: "Do not be afraid. Let your spirit descend and change the image of the land ... this land." The Polish people felt that he was speaking so directly to them, and gave them the courage to demand freedom and human rights in Poland.

I will end by asking all members in this House to support this bill in honour of our Pope, blessed John Paul II.

Remarks in Polish.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

The member from Mississauga East—Cooksville, you have two minutes to respond.

Ms. Dipika Damerla: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It has been such a joy to listen to all of the people. I'd like to thank the member from Burlington, the members from Parkdale—High Park, Kitchener—Waterloo, Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry, York South—Weston, Oshawa, Mississauga—Streetsville, Durham and Oak Ridges—Markham who took the time to speak to this bill today.

Speaker, you know, usually when there's a debate, there's a back and forth and it tends to be a little bit argumentative. What a pleasure it was today to hear all sides speak out in favour of this bill. What I learned—I

thought I'd done a lot of research going into this to write my speech and everything, but I learned so much just listening to everybody else speak—the anecdotes, the facts; the one million—was it kilometres or miles? I forget—that he's supposed to have travelled. Just little tidbits, but mostly the passion that this House has to make this a reality in Ontario.

So all I can hope is that we can do this by 2014, because I think that will be really symbolic, because it's going to mark something tangible: a quarter-century of the fall of Communism, the restoration of democracy in Poland, something that this man had a direct hand in and that will go down in history.

Earlier today, I was speaking to the member from Leeds—Grenville, and he said something that I agree with: He said that 500 years from now, we'll still be speaking about this Pope, and he is right, because he belongs in that league of men who are immortal.

I really hope that at the end of today, we will walk out of here with a consensus to continue with this bill and enact this into legislation, and that on April 2, 2014, for the first time, we will have Pope John Paul II Day here in Ontario.

VISITORS

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member for Bramalea—Gore—Malton.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker. I'm just rising on a point of order, if I could have the House's indulgence to briefly introduce a couple of special guests that I have here.

I have Kuljinder Singh Sidhu and Dinesh Sood, the producer and the lead actor of the Punjabi movie of the year for 2013, the third-highest-grossing Punjabi movie of all time. The movie focuses on human rights issues. It's called *Sadda Haq*. They're here in the House.

Please join me in welcoming them, as well as Bali Kaur, who hosts the most popular radio show in the South Asian community, from Vancouver.

A good friend of mine, Amarjeet Singh, as well as Mandeep Kaur, Harbaljeet Singh and Ina Samridhi, are also with us.

Please join me in welcoming them all.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Thank you. We'll take the vote at the end of private members' business.

REGULATED HEALTH PROFESSIONS AMENDMENT ACT (SPOUSAL EXCEPTION), 2013 LOI DE 2013 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LES PROFESSIONS DE LA SANTÉ RÉGLEMENTÉES (EXCEPTION RELATIVE AU CONJOINT)

Mr. Clark moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 70, An Act to amend the Regulated Health Professions Act, 1991 / Projet de loi 70, Loi modifiant la Loi de 1991 sur les professions de la santé réglementées.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Pursuant to standing order 98, the member has 12 minutes for his presentation.

Mr. Steve Clark: It's a great pleasure for me to rise today to begin second reading debate on Bill 70, An Act to amend the Regulated Health Professions Act, 1991.

I do want to thank many people who have worked hard to shape this bill. Earlier today, I introduced a number of members from the Ontario Dental Association, who were really the champions, with members of provincial Parliament—and I'll get into some details on my own personal involvement.

In the galleries today, we have representatives from the Royal College of Dental Surgeons. We also have folks from the Association of Ontario Midwives. In the west members' gallery, we have: Bob Haig, the CEO of the Ontario Chiropractic Association; Claudia Mariano, the past president of the Nurse Practitioners' Association of Ontario; and Theresa Agnew, the executive director of the Nurse Practitioners' Association of Ontario.

I want to thank all of those folks and their associations for all of the guidance and excellent advice that they have provided as we shaped Bill 70. I'm confident that there is some support for the bill today.

The bill also represents a commitment that our leader of the official opposition, Tim Hudak, made to Dr. Harry Hoediono, who was the then president of the ODA, in June 2011. In a letter to the good doctor, our leader, Mr. Hudak, committed that he would work with the ODA to make the necessary changes to the RHPA, which prohibits a dentist from treating his or her spouse because it would automatically be considered sexual abuse. He addressed their conference in November 2010 and again reiterated that support.

Before I get into the history of how Bill 70 came into being, I want to talk about what the legislation does. First, I think it's absolutely essential to stress that it does not undermine the zero-tolerance policy on sexual abuse in the relationship between any health professional and their patient. Throughout the process, I was adamant that any bill I would introduce with my name on it would in no way put any patient at risk or weaken the zero-tolerance policy. There must be zero tolerance for sexual conduct, behaviour or remarks to enter into the relationship between a patient and their health care provider. Any violation of this most fundamental tenet of the duty of care and the trust a patient places in the hands of a dentist, doctor, physiotherapist or any of the other health care professions should be dealt with in the strongest possible way. As I said, that will continue to be the case, should Bill 70 receive royal assent.

1540

But there's a feeling by many colleges governed by the RHPA that a member's spouse should be exempted from that zero-tolerance provision. Indeed, the Health Professions Regulatory Advisory Council, or HPRAC, stated it very clearly in its June 2012 recommendations on the spousal exemption to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. They wrote, "The ethical principles of

power imbalance, transference, trust and consent underpin the sexual abuse provisions in the RHPA and were introduced with the intent to eradicate sexual abuse of patients by health professionals. The provisions defined sexual abuse and prescribed a rigorous penalty." However, the report added, "It was not the intent of the legislation to be misused maliciously or be the mechanism to deter certain professions from the treatment of their spouse."

I agree with HPRAC. There is room to responsibly allow for a professional college to determine if its membership feels its appropriate to allow one spouse to treat another. That's the fundamental principle in Bill 70: It's up to those individual colleges to make a regulation to adopt the spousal exemption.

One of the issues we've considered very carefully in crafting this bill is the definition of "spouse." After much input, we've determined the following to be the most appropriate:

"(a) a person who is the member's spouse as defined in section 1 of the Family Law Act, or

"(b) a person who has lived with the member in a conjugal relationship outside of marriage continuously for a period not less than three years."

Let's get back to how we got here. I have to admit that when our party leader, Mr. Hudak, wrote a couple years ago, I really had no idea about this issue. It wasn't until a couple of months later, on the eve of the 2011 election, when I had one of my teeth fixed, Speaker, and I certainly got an earful from my dentist—a great dentist, I should add—Dr. Doug Harvey in Brockville. Let's just say, Speaker, that Doug Harvey recognized a good opportunity, with his MPP in the chair, to do a bit of effective lobbying. He had a bit of a captive audience in front of him.

Ms. Soo Wong: He couldn't talk.

Mr. Steve Clark: I couldn't talk. That's right, as the member for Scarborough-Agincourt realized; one of the few times I couldn't talk.

The ODA representatives here today would be very proud of Dr. Doug Harvey, I'm sure. Also, we have a great president of our local dental association in Leeds-Grenville, Dr. Kim Hansen. And it would be remiss of me not to mention a good friend, Dr. John Arnott, who has been certainly involved in the political scene in Brockville and Leeds-Grenville for many years. You have some great representatives in my riding.

I certainly agreed with Dr. Harvey, Speaker, that it was ridiculous that a dentist was considered to have committed sexual assault if he fixed his wife's fillings, and no one that I mentioned that to disagreed. It just seemed like one of those crazy regulations government comes up with that may be well intentioned but simply don't work in the real world. That's particularly true, I think, in rural or northern Ontario, where there may not be that viable option for a person to receive timely treatment other than turning to his or her spouse.

So I was pleased in April 2012 to introduce Bill 68 as my first attempt to amend the Regulated Health Profes-

sions Act by creating a spousal exemption. Like many bills introduced that year, Bill 68 never reached the stage that we're at today because, as you know, the House prorogued and we had a bit of a holiday for four months.

That's the connection I wanted to make between the fact that we prorogued and the original version of my bill. When the bill died, I took the opportunity to listen to the comments that the health minister made to me at the reception that we held with ODA the day that I introduced Bill 68. I remember her comments very clearly. She called my approach with Bill 68 a simplistic approach to the problem. Frankly, I thought a simplistic approach was better than the one that the ministry had taken to date. They had essentially promised ODA that the bill would come forward, and hadn't really committed to doing anything.

I accepted her criticism, I took it to heart and I used the fact that we prorogued Parliament to listen to what HPRAC had said, to engage with a number of the health professionals and to bring back a bill. When the House returned, I introduced Bill 40 in March, which contained a fundamental change from the earlier version and, I felt, took into consideration HPRAC's recommendations.

Since then, I have to say that I have had a lengthy engagement with the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care on this new Bill 70. I know it's quite remarkable to have that level of co-operation between the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care and an opposition MPP. In fact, I'm told that in some cases it's unprecedented. So I would like to publicly thank the ministry staff for their co-operation and their work that led to the changes that are enclosed in Bill 70 today. I think it's quite a journey, quite a learning process from that first time that I sat in the dentist chair to understand what the problem is. We have a bill here in front of us that I'm confident in telling members of the House will make an important public policy change without putting patients at risk.

It's important to note there are a number of stakeholders, some that I've mentioned, who have endorsed the bill. I also wanted to mention a stakeholder conference call that we had after Bill 70 was tabled, where Thomas Corcoran, the chair of the Health Professions Regulatory Advisory Council, indicated that he was supportive of the bill. Even the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario, which has written to me to express its concerns about the spousal exemption, stated the following: "Nonetheless, we recognize that your proposed Bill 70 is a significant improvement over the previously proposed Bill 68, as well as the HPRAC recommendation." A further quote: "Principally, the proposed Bill 70 is drafted as an opt-in provision. Bill 70 would only apply to those colleges that opt to enact the spousal exemption, pursuant to the minister's approval."

Again, I think that's the key that we're talking about today. I would really hope—and I know that I've had some members of the government side express some support. I'll let the New Democrats speak for themselves, but I think we've got an opportunity, like some of the other bills that were presented today, where I hope we'll

have the general support of members in the House so that we can send this bill forward. I'm hoping that in this minority Parliament this is the type of bill that we can get to committee and ultimately get passed.

I do want to mention before I close that I felt very good—our House leader, Jim Wilson, the member for Simcoe-Grey, had mentioned to me that he had a press conference this morning and mentioned to the media a number of bills that he hoped would be passed, bills from our caucus. He mentioned my colleague the member for Oxford and his Hawkins Gignac bill on carbon monoxide detectors that he hoped would be passed; and he also mentioned Bill 70. So I want to thank Mr. Wilson for his confidence in this bill.

I also want to thank members of my caucus, because I know that they've been very supportive as we've gone through the three versions of this particular bill, quite different versions from where we started to where we are today. Again, I want to thank the ministry and I want to thank the members opposite for having that relationship. It's very unique to have the government lawyers and my legislative counsel lawyer working together on this bill.

My bill, as I said, leaves it up to the individual colleges to make that decision. We know there are many health professionals, including the dozens of dentists I think all members of this House have heard from, who believe it's appropriate that they should have the right to treat their spouse. This bill is giving them that opportunity, and I am hopeful that we'll take the next step in this process this afternoon by passing Bill 70 and moving it forward to committee.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

M^{me} France Gélinas: I want to start by answering the question that the member has asked: Would the New Democrats be supporting this bill? Absolutely. We will be voting in favour of this bill and sending it for second reading. You can rest assured on this one; we want it to go to second reading. But we also want second reading to come with an opportunity for people to be heard.

1550

We have heard bits and pieces of a letter that the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario has written. I will read the letter into the record, because it sort of explains why people need to be heard on that issue.

When people think about dentists—we've all been there—the thing that stays in our mind is we're stuck there with our mouth open at the mercy of this person who hopefully will help us without hurting us, which happens 99% of the time. It always happens with my dentist; I can guarantee you she is very good and I love her. I, like many other MPPs, have been visited by a number of dentists. I thank them for the great work that they do.

Interjection.

M^{me} France Gélinas: Okay, well, I like mine. She's a very nice lady.

They do fantastic work. We are sort of lucky in Ontario that we don't really have an underserviced area. I

serve an area in northeastern Ontario that is made up of 33 small communities. We often have problems of access to health care. With dental, when there's a problem of access, it's not really because we don't have a dentist. It's more because we don't have a means to gain access to the dentist because people don't have the money to pay, which is a completely different issue than when we talk about problems of access to physician services, which simply are not available in parts of my riding. Dentists are available, it's just people can't gain access to them because they don't have the money to pay.

But coming back to Bill 70, which we will be supporting, I will read into the record the full letter, and then explain a little bit more why I did that. It's dated May 28, 2013. It is addressed to Mr. Clark, MPP, and it says:

"Re: Bill 70, Regulated Health Professions Amendment Act (Spousal Exception), 2013.

"We write in response to the recent introduction of Bill 70, Regulated Health Professions Amendment Act (Spousal Exception), 2013 in the Ontario Legislature. While the College of Physicians and Surgeons is of the view that the current Regulated Health Professions Act, 1991 (RHAP) legislation is not in need of any amendment on this issue, we appreciate your effort to consider the college's concern with your initial bill.

"In August of 2012, the college responded to the concerning HPRAC recommendation in a letter to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care, setting out our strong objection to the Health Professions Regulatory Advisory Council's (HPRAC) recommendation that the treatment of spouses by health care professionals should be expressly exempted in the sexual abuse provisions of the RHPA. The college strongly believes that a spousal exemption would fundamentally undermine the zero tolerance provisions on sexual abuse contained in the RHPA, which is a critical mechanism for public protection."

A little editorial: The college is there to protect the public.

"These provisions have long been upheld by the current and previous Ontario governments, going back to the early 1990s, as based upon the source Task Force on Sexual Abuse of Patients initiated by this college.

"As previously submitted to the minister, the college believes that any exemption is dangerous to the zero tolerance scheme because the exemption will be a clear move away from the previous clear provision that a patient cannot consent to sexual relations with his or her health care provider. A recognition that a patient can consent to sexual relations with their health care provider will foster an opportunity for those having sexual relations with their patients to attempt to advance the defense of consent in countless other scenarios. As previously indicated, we can reasonably foresee arguments being advanced by members accused of sexual abuse, that any complainant is as capable as a spouse to consent to sexual relations within a treating relationship. This would be a fertile ground for litigation. This litiga-

tion can be expected to include more charter challenges, engaging resources not only of the college but also of the government and other interested parties.

"The college does not support any change to the mandatory revocation provisions. Nonetheless, we recognize that your proposed Bill 70 is a significant improvement over the previously proposed Bill 68, as well as the HPRAC recommendation. Principally, the proposed Bill 70 is drafted as an 'opt-in' provision. Bill 70 would only apply to those colleges that opt to enact the spousal exemption, pursuant to the minister's approval.

"As noted in the college's letter to the minister last year, we are aware that some health professional groups have advanced arguments in favour of a spousal exemption because they feel it would be convenient and appropriate to treat their spouse; this is not the case for physicians. The college is in the best position to comment on the power imbalance in the physician/patient relationship, and not on relationships between other health professionals and their patients.

"Notwithstanding the college recognition of Bill 70's progress, we would like to take this opportunity to highlight a couple of issues with the current drafting of Bill 70.

"Specifically:

"(i) With respect to the definition of 'spouse,' as provided in the proposed amendment to section 1(6) of schedule 2 ... to the RHPA, it has historically proven difficult to define the term 'spouse.' One need only look to courts throughout Ontario where the Family Law Act definition of 'spouse' is applied to find examples of the extensive litigation that flows over the issue of whether a person is a spouse and when the relationship began and ended.

"Although it is recognized that the proposed definition is an improvement over the earlier bill, due to detailed fact finding process required to evaluate whether a spousal or conjugal relationship is present ... any definition of 'spouse' will result in extensive litigation before discipline panels, who will be required to focus upon whether a spousal relationship was present and/or whether the relationship had sufficient characteristics to be characterized as a 'conjugal relationship.'

"The complex deliberations required will create enormous delays and sidetrack proceedings. This is not in the public interest. As stated by the Court of Appeal for Ontario ...

"(ii) The proposed subsection 1(5)(b) of schedule 2 ... to the RHPA, sets out that in order for a member to take advantage of the sexual abuse exemption the member cannot be engaged in the practice of the profession at the time the conduct, behaviour or remark occurs. With respect to this, the college believes that this provision will be very difficult to interpret and enforce, and will result in discipline panels being bogged down in a determination of the exact point when the 'practice of the profession' began and ended in a specific instance and when the 'conduct, behaviour or remarks of a sexual nature' began. It is easy to foresee a situation wherein the

two points of contact will bleed together. Indeed, the challenge of drawing a fine line between ‘practice of the profession’ and ‘conduct, behaviour or remarks of a sexual nature’ highlights one aspect of the problematic nature of a spouse providing treatment to his or her spouse.

“The college is appreciative of your efforts to consider our concerns with your initial bill. We are grateful to have had the opportunity to meet with you to discuss our concerns.

“Given the critical significance of the problem of sexual abuse by health care professionals and the dangerous potential this bill has to dilute current protection of patients from such abuse, it is imperative that the bill not pass without committee consideration. Special interest groups including victim groups must be provided an opportunity to provide feedback on Bill 70.

“Thank you for the time and consideration you have shown to our concerns.

“Sincerely”—it’s signed by the president, Eric Stanton, and the registrar, Rocco Gerace.

It was copied to me, which is why I read it. I have similar letters that came from the College of Nurses of Ontario and from the Ontario Coalition of Rape Crisis Centres etc.

So, do we support the bill? Absolutely. Those provisions were put in place in 1991. We are now in 2013. Things have changed. We have a number of professionals who have joined us today because they want to see changes. Those changes have been captured in the bill, a bill that is worth debating today, and certainly a bill that is worth opening up to committee.

Before I conclude, I want everybody to remember that when we go to the dentist, we go because we need dental care. But you have to remember that dentists also have open prescribing. They are one of only two professions, with physicians, that have this.

Remember when OxyContin came onto the market? People with an addiction to this drug quickly went through all the physicians who were barred from prescribing this, but a dentist can provide you with any medication that they want to prescribe. They have open prescribing. So you can see that if you are a person who is addicted to a type of medication, we often go to the dentist. Although we can have a tumour the size of a grapefruit in one of our organs, for some reason we don’t have any pain, but if you have a toothache, well, it hurts, like a toothache, doesn’t it?

1600

So the dentists have been given open prescribing so that they can give you things that will help you deal with your toothaches. But it also means that they prescribe narcotics. When you look at where abuse takes place, when you look at how you set the table for a health provider to abuse a woman—because most of the time they are women—it often goes not through drilling of cavities and all of this, it often goes through the prescription pad. Because a woman who is addicted to a narcotic will do anything to get the next fix. That means letting a tooth get infected and going to the dentist.

Doctor shopping, in my neck of the woods, is not heard of because it takes you five weeks to get an emergency visit with your physician, but you can visit your dentist the same day. You can visit five dentists the same day with an abscessed tooth and get five prescriptions for narcotics. When you come back the next week to the same dentist, if he is an abuser, he will know why you’re there, and we don’t know how it will end. Those people need to be heard.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Ms. Helena Jaczek: I’m happy to rise in the House and support Bill 70, that has been brought forward by our colleague from Leeds–Grenville. I do want to commend him for the amount of work he has done on this bill, not only with the dental profession but also with the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care—he alluded to this—in terms of carefully working out definitions and so on. That’s the type of collegiality we like to see in this House.

As is known, Bill 70 proposes that the regulated health professions be allowed the capacity to treat their spouses, something that is currently prohibited. The legislation before the House today would give professional health colleges the ability to make the choice to allow their members to treat their spouses. This flexibility and choice afforded to the colleges with this proposed legislation is important: Our government believes in self-governing health professions, and we feel professional colleges are best placed to determine what is appropriate for their membership.

It is important to recognize that the proposed legislation still maintains the strict protections from sexual abuse by health professionals, including those professionals’ spouses.

Under the Regulated Health Professions Act, it is the health professional colleges’ responsibility to investigate complaints made by the public against their members, and we have full confidence in health professional colleges to conduct full and fair investigations.

So this bill is about choice and equity. It gives the regulated health care professions the choice to determine if it is the correct decision to allow spousal treatment and helps further ensure that all Ontarians have equal access to some of the best health care in the world. The public has a high level of trust placed in their regulated health professionals, which is of the utmost importance in the health professional-patient relationship and must be protected.

Our government is also committed to providing high-quality and accessible care to all Ontarians. In fact, a key commitment of our action plan for health care is to ensure Ontarians get the right care in the right place at the right time. This legislation would build on our government’s current work and would continue to further help provide those in rural and northern Ontario with increased access to health care.

There are small and isolated rural communities where access to health professionals is more limited. By pro-

hibiting health professionals in these types of communities from treating their spouse, it becomes much more difficult for the spouse to receive treatment. The proposed legislation would enhance accessibility to health care services and enhance the choice Ontarians have in finding a health professional while maintaining strict protections against sexual abuse.

As it relates to, obviously, a zero tolerance of sexual abuse, we need to ensure that there is a uniform definition of spouse that would apply to all professions that choose to adopt this. It would ensure a high level of protection for Ontario patients against sexual abuse. Our government is committed to protecting Ontario patients and has clearly demonstrated that we have zero tolerance for sexual abuse.

Bill 70 aligns with how other jurisdictions handle the treatment of spouses by health professions. The proposed bill also clearly outlines the definition of spouse that aligns with the definition found in other pieces of legislation in Ontario. Having this definition in place removes the need for subjectivity in discipline hearings to determine the nature of a relationship and whether a spousal relationship did exist at the time of the misconduct.

I will conclude by saying that I urge all members to support this bill. It's always useful to have additional discussion at committee so that we can hear some of the concerns mentioned by my colleague from the NDP, but this is a very good step forward. I will certainly be supporting this bill.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Mrs. Jane McKenna: I know I introduced them earlier on, when we came back into the House, but I see that Dr. Larry Pedlar, who is the co-chair of the Coalition to Restore Spousal Rights and Freedoms, and Dr. Vipan Maini are now here. They're my Burlington constituent doctors, and I just wanted to do a shout-out first about that.

I'm pleased to rise to speak to Bill 70, Regulated Health Professions Amendment Act (Spousal Exemption). I have had uniformly supportive and encouraging correspondence related to Bill 70 from dozens of dentists and health professionals in my riding of Burlington. They are quite aware of this contentious issue and are closely following the debate and progress of Bill 70.

I am happy to echo their support for the proposed legislation brought forward by my honourable colleague the member for Leeds-Grenville. I'd also like to say that he's a very passionate and compassionate person, and they're in great hands having him do this bill. He has brought forward legislation in earlier sessions, and my constituents in Burlington certainly appreciate the member from Leeds-Grenville's dedication to this cause.

This bill, if passed and enacted, would amend the 1991 Regulated Health Professions Act to allow regulated health professionals to treat their spouses if their councils make a regulation to allow members to do so.

There is no question that the harm to any patient sexually abused by a health professional is profound. It

shatters trust and can result in unimaginable trauma. Our health care providers must, of course, be held to an exceptional standard of legal and ethical propriety for the protection of patients.

Health care providers must shoulder these elevated expectations and respect these legal and ethical boundaries to ensure that encounters with patients are therapeutic. Dentists support a zero-tolerance policy as it relates to sexual abuse. Those colleges that make the regulations to allow spousal treatments will retain the same disciplinary powers to investigate instances of sexual abuse, whether they occur within the spousal relationship or with a patient outside of a spousal relationship.

Currently, if a member of a regulated health profession provides care to their spouse, it is classified as sexual abuse by default. Bill 70 aims to introduce a common sense change to the code by eliminating the default charge of sexual abuse within colleges that have a history of treating spouses.

Bill 70 will not loosen the zero-tolerance policy on sexual abuse. What it will do is benefit residents of rural and northern Ontario, where there may be only one health care provider in the region.

This bill has the support of dental health professionals, and it was developed in conjunction with Ministry of Health officials, who have been supportive of the changes made to this legislation.

I join the health professionals in my riding of Burlington in urging the unanimous support and swift passage of this legislation.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: It's a pleasure to join the debate on Bill 70 this afternoon. It appears we're having one of those afternoons where everybody, for the most part, is getting along well and seems to be agreeing. That's, I think, especially good for this one.

1610

Interjection.

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: That could change in a minute, I realize that.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Let's not ruin it.

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: We still have the votes to go, but it appears that there's a sense of agreement on this one, and there's, I think, a willingness that this move forward.

When you think about dentistry, we all have a personal relationship, I think, with the people that we allow to perform dentistry on us. In my particular case, I've been seeing the same dentist for probably over 30 years now. His name is Dr. Paul Eisner. He's actually the team dentist for the Grey Cup champions, the Toronto Argos, as well. He's a wonderful man, and we've developed a friendship over the years. I've watched his practice grow from being basically a one-man office to quite a substantial office just on the border of Oakville and Mississauga.

I want to credit the member from Leeds-Grenville for bringing the bill to this point, where it's before the

House. It appears to be meeting with the approval of the House as well. To get it to this point, I think it's also coming forward with a recommendation from the Ministry of Health that this bill could indeed work.

What I particularly like about the approach that is being taken—and I've worked with the ODA in the past on this issue. At one point, it was thought that perhaps a co-sponsored bill may be appropriate in this regard. I was quite happy to see if I could be a part of that, if I could facilitate that. As it works out, I think the member from Leeds-Grenville has done yeomen's service in ensuring that when the bill finally made the floor of the House for debate, the bill had been through a process with some stakeholders and through a process with the Ministry of Health that allowed for some changes to the bill that alleviated some of the concerns that were present when the bill was first drafted and introduced.

If we look at the trust we place in those health professionals in our society in Ontario—I think we've all got chiropractors and naturopaths and family doctors and physiotherapists. These professions all have the ability to self-regulate through their colleges. I think they bring forward ideas that advance the medicine they practise but they also regulate the conduct of their members. I think that's just as important as any other service provided by the college in that when something is alleged to have happened that shouldn't have happened, it's the college, it's the members themselves that self-regulate and jump into action to ensure that the offending action is stopped and hopefully never repeated.

In this case, the way it was explained to me when it was first introduced to me as an issue is that if you have a normal dentist, a man or a woman, performing normal dentistry on a family member, on a spouse, and having normal sexual relations with that same person, then technically, that would be considered sexual abuse. That, I think anybody in this House would agree, is absurd. Those people who are perhaps afraid that this is opening the door to some sort of approval of sexual abuse—I think that those concerns should be allayed immediately. My understanding is that we've got zero tolerance for sexual abuse in all the regulated colleges, and that continues and only increases as time goes by.

So I believe that what we have before us allows each one of the professions to decide whether they would like to avail themselves of the changes that are envisioned under this bill. It's an opt-in. If you feel that this isn't right for your profession, if you feel that this is something that's not right for your college, certainly the membership of that college and the executive of that college are free to opt in or out.

It's not something that is being foisted upon the colleges. It's not something that one profession is foisting upon another profession. It's actually the one profession saying, "We think we can make this work for us. If you give us the option to use this, then we're going to be able to do something that we think works in the best interests of our patients and our families." I agree with that approach. I think that the work that's been done by the

member from Leeds-Grenville—I think he was very frank in his admission that he listened to some of the advice he was getting and agreed, at the end of the day, that perhaps there were some shortcomings that were present in the original draft and has changed those, and has been honest and open about it and has said that at the end of the day, he thinks that this has made it a better bill.

So I'm very pleased to stand here today and say that I will be supporting this bill. I think that most members of the House—in fact, every member who has spoken so far is saying that they will also support the bill. It will go through a committee process like any other bill typically goes through in this House. If there are any amendments that need to be made, if there are any improvements that need to be made, then certainly I think that the process is open to those amendments. Any stakeholders who think that they need to be heard from further could be accommodated at that time.

In closing, I'd like to thank the member from Leeds-Grenville for bringing forward this bill, the Regulated Health Professions Amendment Act (Spousal Exception), 2013. I think it's a sensible approach to solve an issue that a profession with a long and proud history in the province of Ontario has brought to the attention of the legislators in this province, so it doesn't surprise me that it's probably going to receive the approval today of all three parties. I think the redeeming value of the whole thing is really the introduction of the opt-in provision. I think what that does is that it really opens it up to the professions themselves. It puts the ball back in their court. If this is something that they think is right for them, I think that they've proven in the past that they're responsible enough and mature enough to avail themselves of it in a proper way; if they think it's not for them, then certainly they do not have to do it.

I'll be supporting the bill, and thank you to the member from Leeds-Grenville for introducing it today.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Mr. John O'Toole: It's a distinct pleasure to get up and support my colleague from Leeds-Grenville and commend him for the work that he has done on this to find consensus amongst the regulated health professions.

It's more or less a modernization effort. If I look at the small preamble section, I think it's very important to clarify what it says here: "The exception is only available to a member of a particular health profession if the member's college makes a regulation that adopts the exception."

So it really allows the regulated profession specifically, whether it's dentists or chiropractors or whomever, in their college, the regulating body, to create an exemption in regulation. They could even talk about the controlled act specifically to whichever their entitlements to provide a treatment to their spouse. I think it is modernization. I say that in the context of a very good constituent of mine, Jack Cottrell, who was the head of the Ontario Dental Association. Then he was the head of the Canadian Dental Association, and I think now he's

the head of the world dental association or at least the international, and I recognize Frank Bevilacqua from the ODA, as well as Bob Haig, the CEO of the chiropractors of Ontario. It's important to see that the midwife association is here as well.

I think this is really an opportunity for the professions to look at what acts can be executed or performed by the professional, and, again, they are the regulating body. They are also the disciplinary body, so I think it's good work moving forward. I think the discussion is educating the public on an issue that often isn't talked about. Thank you for the opportunity.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Mr. Jim McDonell: I'm proud to rise to speak to the bill by the honourable member from Leeds—Grenville, who I know has put a lot of work into this bill previously and again as he got consensus throughout this House.

This bill addresses a textbook example of an unintended consequence. In urban areas, the effects of the schedule, as it currently is implemented, are not nearly as heavily felt as they are in rural areas because a physician's spouse has a greater choice of seeking a non-related health professional to get treatment in large urban centres. In rural, small urban and northern Ontario, the density of medical practitioners is in the order of magnitudes lower. In its present form, the act makes being married to a health practitioner a curse because you may not be able to get the treatment you need. This bill does not loosen the tolerance for sexual abuse by medical professionals, whom we hold in a great degree of trust and we expect to be models of integrity.

1620

To safeguard the independence of medical profession colleges, this bill enables the colleges to adopt a spousal exception rather than imposing it on them. These organizations are well qualified to make this important determination. It is simply an infusion of common sense where it is needed. We look forward to this bill receiving third reading as soon as possible—maybe even today.

Over the past 10 years, this province has seen mountains of regulations and red tape created that get in the way of entrepreneurs who are trying to start or expand a business. This regulation goes beyond the realm of common sense and affects the personal lives of spouses. This regulation has unintended consequences, and it is time to pass this bill.

In my family, my uncle, Dr. McLeod, back in the 1940s was helped out by the community through medical school. For decades before the days of OHIP, he provided medical care for many of the people in the community, often at no charge. He was our family doctor. He looked after his nieces and nephews, his brothers and sisters, his sons and daughters and his wife. He certainly was key in our medical health, as he could help us through the web of the complicated health services that we have today, and truly, in the latter days of my own father, was a big help. In his own case, my aunt, his wife—somebody was needed who had the knowledge and the experience and certainly shouldn't be discrimin-

ated against in providing that service. So I think it's a well-timed and well-deserved amendment to this bill.

I commend the member from Leeds—Grenville again for this bill.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate.

Mr. Rick Nicholls: It's my pleasure to rise and speak to Bill 70, the Regulated Health Professions Amendment Act (Spousal Exception). My colleague the MPP from Leeds—Grenville has worked with the Ministry of Health on this issue, and this bill reflects their recommendations. This bill seeks to allow health professionals to treat their spouses.

I'll use the example of dentists to explain this issue to the folks at home. Under current law, if a dentist treats their spouse, they are automatically guilty of sexual abuse. There is zero tolerance and no chance of any appeal. To say this is ridiculous is, of course, an understatement. Inferring that a dentist or even a dental hygienist who treats their wife, spouse or significant other is guilty of sexual abuse is absolutely disgraceful.

A Toronto Star article mentioned that Health Minister Matthews had asked the Health Professions Regulatory Advisory Council to look into the matter and to make recommendations. That was back on April 18, 2011—over two years ago. This goes to show just how quickly this Liberal government takes action. With tongue in cheek, Speaker, getting results from this government is sometimes like pulling teeth, no pun intended at all.

This is a straightforward issue, and this bill is a quick and easy fix. My office has received a large number of emails from dentists throughout the Chatham-Kent-Essex riding who support this bill.

My good friend from Chatham and the current president of the ODA, Dr. Art Worth, and I have had several excellent discussions on this serious issue. He stated that dentists support zero tolerance for sexual abuse and that colleges that allow spousal treatment will still be able to discipline inappropriate conduct. It's worth noting that this bill does not loosen the zero tolerance policy on genuine cases of sexual abuse; it just simply allows the professional treatment of spouses.

Dr. Bruce Warwick, also from Chatham, shared the following comments:

"Imagine criminalizing a dentist for even looking at his/her spouse's teeth, let alone cleaning or repairing them. If caught, we stand to lose our licence for five years and face a criminal record (meaning no visits to the USA for five years) with absolutely no appeal process allowed. Almost every dentist in the province treats their spouse, or did so, until this legislation was passed. It's just ridiculous. You really have to marvel at the total lack of common sense that was employed in this decision."

I really think that it's time that we use some common sense and listen to Dr. Worth's and Dr. Warwick's appeal. Let's get this simple logic changed, and let's get it achieved now.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member for Leeds—Grenville, you have two minutes for a response.

Mr. Steve Clark: I want to thank the member for Nickel Belt, the member for Oak Ridges—Markham, the members for Burlington, Oakville, Durham, Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry and Chatham—Kent—Essex for their comments.

I also want to mention to the member for Oakville that I do appreciate his offer to co-sponsor the bill. I know we had some discussions among the three parties about that possibility. I know that didn't happen for reasons that it's not really appropriate to even talk about. I think what we should be focusing on is the fact that there is co-operation for this bill at second reading.

It's great that the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care, the member for Oak Ridges—Markham, did have a chance to speak. I know I spoke to the minister in the chamber earlier this week, and I want to also recognize her senior policy adviser who worked with my office, Brigid Buckingham, for her work as well. I think she did an excellent job liaising between our departments.

I also want to say that the member for Wellington—Halton Hills reminded me that there is someone from the ODA who isn't with us today, and that's Maggie Head, whom all members know from her time here working for Speaker Peters. I know her father has just recently passed away, so on behalf of our caucus and certainly all members, we want to express our condolences to Maggie and her family on their loss. I know she was a driving force, along with Frank and our dentists, in all of our ridings in making sure this came to the floor today.

I want to thank everyone for their support. I want to thank all of the professions that are here today for all their constructive criticism, suggestions, patience with three versions of this legislation, and I hope all members will support this bill.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The time provided for private members' public business has expired.

PROTECTING EMPLOYEES' TIPS ACT, 2013

LOI DE 2013 SUR LA PROTECTION DU POURBOIRE DES EMPLOYÉS

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): We will deal first with ballot item number 28, standing in the name of Mr. Prue.

Mr. Prue has moved second reading of Bill 49, An Act to amend the Employment Standards Act, 2000 with respect to tips and other gratuities.

Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Second reading agreed to.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member for Beaches—East York.

Mr. Michael Prue: I would like to send this bill, please, to Legislative Assembly.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member has requested that the bill be referred to Legislative Assembly. Agreed? Agreed.

POPE JOHN PAUL II DAY ACT, 2013

LOI DE 2013 SUR LE JOUR DU PAPE JEAN-PAUL II

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Ms. Damerla has moved second reading of Bill 72, An Act to proclaim Pope John Paul II Day.

Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Second reading agreed to.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member for Mississauga East—Cooksville.

Ms. Dipika Damerla: Standing Committee on Regulations and Private Bills, Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member has requested the bill be referred to the Standing Committee on Regulations and Private Bills. Agreed? Agreed.

REGULATED HEALTH PROFESSIONS AMENDMENT ACT (SPOUSAL EXCEPTION), 2013

LOI DE 2013 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LES PROFESSIONS DE LA SANTÉ RÉGLEMENTÉES (EXCEPTION RELATIVE AU CONJOINT)

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Mr. Clark moved second reading of Bill 70, An Act to amend the Regulated Health Professions Act, 1991.

Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Second reading agreed to.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member for Leeds—Grenville.

Mr. Steve Clark: In the spirit of co-operation: the Legislative Assembly committee.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member has requested that the bill be referred to the Legislative Assembly committee. Agreed? Agreed.

1630

ORDERS OF THE DAY

ORDER OF BUSINESS

Resuming the debate adjourned on May 30, 2013, on the amendment to the amendment to the motion to apply a timetable to certain business of the House.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Mr. Rod Jackson: It's always a privilege and an honour to rise in this House and represent the great riding

of Barrie, as well as to be the voice of Ontarians from all over the province. That is, after all, what we were all elected and sent here to do. We're elected and sent here to represent the interests of Ontarians, and to ensure that the province is put on the path to success.

I take that role very seriously. In fact, I consider it more than a job; it's a duty to stand in this House and have my constituents voices be heard. We all have the privilege of standing here, working towards improving the future of our province, representing the great people of this province, and I'm afraid to say that I'm not so sure that the Liberal and NDP coalition members in this Legislature share the same respect and duty we have to Ontario.

I'm not so sure because the programming motion that we're debating today is a motion which takes steps to limit our ability to represent those constituencies that we've sworn to represent. The government House leader has called it a simple procedural motion, which assigns timelines to certain bills for their passage in the House, but he neglects to focus on the fact that the timeline this government is pushing purposefully limits the ability of many members in this House to stand up and voice the opinions of their constituents, exactly what we were sent here to do.

This is not the first time a Liberal government has attempted to avoid accountability in this House. Who else could forget the former Premier's move to prorogue this very House? The former Premier shuttered the doors of this Legislative Assembly for 129 days. For over four months, we were locked out and stripped of our opportunity to fully fulfill our role as members of provincial Parliament. We were told to go home and leave dozens and dozens of bills on the table, just so the Liberal Party of Ontario could have a chance to regroup from scandal after scandal—scandals that they brought upon themselves, scandals that have cost the taxpayers of Ontario billions of dollars.

This government ran from its duty. They ran from their commitment to this province. They looked out for their own interests rather than the interests of Ontario, and now they're doing it again. The budget is one of the most important bills that comes before this House. It sets the spending policy of all facets of provincial government for the coming year. The budget, in other words, is the government's opportunity to get the province's financial house in order—and boy, do we need order.

You've heard the numbers before, but they bear repeating, because this government doesn't seem to get it. Our debt is up to \$273 billion and rising—\$1.8 million every hour we stand in here. We spend \$11 billion a year alone just paying down the interest. It's a mess. It's time to get Ontario's books in order.

By the way, Mr. Speaker, I got a news flash today: Standard and Poor's announced just this afternoon that it's cutting Ontario's outlook from "stable" to "negative," with a possible downgrade coming. This is something that we've heard in this House wasn't going to happen. Just this morning, the Premier stood in her place and told

this House that we were not in danger of a credit downgrade. Yet we hear today, "In our opinion, the rate of growth of Ontario's debt burden remains a concern, as it is already at the high end of the range for similarly rated domestic and international peers." That's a direct quote from Standard and Poor's.

You can talk all you want. The fact of the matter is that we're in a dangerous situation with our finances here in Ontario, and it's time to get it right—not put out window dressing—and actually address the issues at hand with bold action. This is the opportunity to start reducing Ontario's massive debt and deficit, debt and deficit that this Liberal government created in the first place.

With such an incredibly important bill before us, it's the duty of every person in here to make sure that the voices of their constituents are represented. Instead, the Premier has moved to limit debate without allowing the appropriate level of debate to proceed. These actions—proroguing Parliament, limiting debate on the most important bill this government puts forward and has to pass—reveal a worrying trend for me. The trend is that this government doesn't care about what Ontarians think. They care only about what's best for their party and for themselves, not what's best for the hard-working people of Ontario.

The people of Barrie elected me to represent them in this Legislature. By limiting debate and running from their responsibility, the McGuinty-Wynne-NDP coalition is deliberately marginalizing the voices of those who wish to be heard, in service of their own selfish interests. This is deeply troubling to me. It's an affront to the people of Ontario, and it's time for the government to stand up and finally do its job, to put Ontario first and stop running from its duty to Ontarians.

Liberal members across the aisle aren't the only members who have neglected their job. Unfortunately, the third party, the NDP to my left, has also adopted a troubling trend of running from what they're elected to do, which brings me to the second distressing development in this programming motion: the creation of the Financial Accountability Office. The idea of a Financial Accountability Office or FAO, as it's referred to, sounds nice and sounds responsible. It's good window dressing, right? Good politics, maybe. It even has the word "accountability" right in its title.

To be sure, nobody could argue against having more accountability in our system, and certainly not Progressive Conservatives. The trouble with this establishment of the FAO is that the mechanism for accountability is taken out of the hands of the members of this very Legislature. We sit here under this eagle, staring down at us to remind us, as the opposition, to watch the government, to make sure we hold them accountable, to do our job as the loyal opposition and make sure that our government does their job.

Our independent officers, from the Ombudsman to the Auditor General, undoubtedly do excellent work in helping to ensure that the government is not abusing its

power. But that fact does not mean we should start to allow all mechanisms of accountability to be located in offices outside of this chamber. Our parliamentary system is designed with a government and an opposition. The job of that opposition, like I said, is to hold the government to account for its practices and policies. Our party sits in this Legislature and does that every single day. It's another role we take very seriously. And yes, my friends over here on the left, that means sometimes making the difficult choice of saying no. It's easy to say yes all the time; you're very good at it, by the way.

But to take these important debates and move them into the office of an independent officer, as the member from Cambridge noted yesterday, is to diminish our own role here in the Legislature. Putting the Financial Accountability Officer in charge, and relying so closely on that officer's accounting and results, effectively diminishes our own role of holding this government to account.

The NDP's push to create an FAO speaks directly to the fact that they've forgotten—or maybe they're just ignoring; I don't know—their own role in holding the government to account. In pushing so hard for the creation of an FAO, the NDP is admitting they cannot do their jobs either. They don't know how to hold this government accountable for its actions, or they won't. Instead, they appoint someone else to do it for them—completely inappropriate.

The third party has tried to tell us that a Financial Accountability Officer is necessary, in light of the many scandals this government has undergone. A Financial Accountability Office will help us avoid the waste of billions of dollars in future, they say. Mr. Speaker, I would argue that maybe there would be less need for independent officers if the NDP wasn't worried about doing their jobs to the fullest extent in the first place. Maybe if the third party stopped selling their souls to prop up a clearly corrupt government, we wouldn't need an FAO to do that job for them.

Nobody would deny for one second that ensuring accountability and transparency from the government is of the utmost importance. However, I submit that the best people for that job are the legislators and members in this House today. I must ask my colleagues in the third party not to be afraid to do their job and start holding this government accountable for its excess. Stop running from your responsibility to the people of Ontario. Don't be afraid to say no from time to time.

Speaking of accountability, this programming motion is actually pretty ironic. This government has also included provisions to limit the future debate of this as yet unseen bill. We do not have the bill before this House outlining the role, procedures and authority of a Financial Accountability Officer, and yet this government is already moving to limit debate about it. In other words, they are limiting accountability and responsibility during the creation of an office that's supposed to stand for accountability and responsibility. Figure that one out, Mr. Speaker. If that's not irony in action, I don't know what is.

1640

The NDP is fond of saying that their leader has led the Premier and the Premier has followed. What they fail to mention afterwards is that the path they're leading this province down is one that has less accountability, less transparency, more spending and more debt that will get passed to future generations: my kids, the member from Cambridge's kids, the member from Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound's kids, the member from Northumberland-Quinte West. We all have young children who are going to bear the burden of this government's failing to take action for creating the debt and deficit and fixing the problem they started in the first place.

The creation of an FAO is supposed to help increase transparency and curb spending. But by supporting it, the third party is clearly removing themselves from their own duty and responsibility to hold this government accountable. Don't be afraid of it. They've given up, and that's another troubling trend for people who are supposed to be here to represent their constituents in this Legislature.

Mr. Speaker, that's why the member from Simcoe-Grey speaks for our whole party when he seeks to amend the motion by including a provision that calls on this government to debate the current want of confidence motion standing on the order paper. That's because we no longer have confidence in this government, Mr. Speaker. That's because we believe the people of Ontario no longer have confidence in this government. We deserve the opportunity to make this voice heard in this chamber, and if you have confidence in yourselves, you'll stand up and let this vote happen. If you don't have confidence in it, you're going to run from it like you are.

We deserve an opportunity to have this voice heard in the chamber. A lot has been made about our commitment to vote against the budget before it was tabled. We made that commitment, Mr. Speaker, because we have had 10 years to watch this Liberal government operate, and their actions are very clear.

They've not shown an ability or commitment to reducing Ontario's debt and deficit—in fact, they've doubled it—so that our children will stop growing up with this tremendous debt hanging over them. We knew before the budget that Ontario's debt has doubled since the Liberals took power in 2003—it was \$139 billion; now it's \$273 billion. Several credit downgrades; one pending. We know that this government, the same one that Ontario has watched for 10 years, has ignored half of the recommendations of their own Liberal hand-picked, appointed economist, Don Drummond, who made recommendations to balance the books. We know that the deficit is on track to double by 2017-18, up to \$411 billion.

Interjection: Are you kidding?

Mr. Rod Jackson: I'm not kidding.

The Liberal government has been unable to make the changes necessary to balance the books. They seem like they are not willing to make the difficult choices that need to be made to get this province back on track, and

the rest of the world is looking at us, shaking their head and wondering, “What is the problem? Why are you not doing this?”

We know that the government is spending \$11 billion a year just to service the debt alone. That’s \$11 billion just making interest payments on our debt. That’s an unbelievable amount of fiscal mismanagement—an unbelievable amount of mismanagement.

We’ve known about these problems for years, and yet this government has completely failed to take the steps to fix this situation. They’ve only allowed it to get worse. That’s 10 years of work to base our judgments off of. It’s been the same government for 10 years that has established a clear track record on economic and financial issues. Needless to say, Mr. Speaker, the track record has been incredibly poor.

That’s why we’ve lost confidence in this government, and that’s why we knew this budget could not fix the incredible number of mistakes and scandals this government has made. It’s important to remember those scandals, because they have, time and again, wasted billions of taxpayers’ dollars despite having dug Ontario’s fiscal hole deeper and deeper every year.

There’s a minimum \$900 million for the Liberal seat-saving gas plant scandal, a number that will surely rise once we have all the facts and figures released. There’s the billion-dollar eHealth scandal. Remember that one? There’s the Ornge scandal, in which the government watched as millions of dollars were misspent and misused by arm’s-length employees of this province.

The scandals are building. Instead of doing the hard work of cutting money from spending in their budget, Premier Wynne is looking to raise taxes in the name of transit—money that we don’t have confidence won’t be mishandled and wasted. How can you have the gall to go to the people of Ontario with your hand out saying, “Yeah, I know we screwed up; I know we cost you hundreds of millions of dollars—a few billion. And you know what? We made a mistake. We’re sorry about that, but we need a bit more.” Please. You know what? People aren’t going to respond well to that; I’ll tell you that right now. You don’t need to do any more studies or have any more conversations. I’ll tell you that the people of Barrie will not stand for it.

The Pan Am Games are quickly approaching. They’re approaching a huge waste as well. Let’s not forget about the \$456 million we’re wasting on a diesel air-rail link before electrifying it, and the hundreds of millions of dollars they’ve wasted on venue construction and overruns in costs and the lack of an actual, tangible budget. It’s 17 lines, the budget for the Pan Am Games, for a \$1.4-million budget—17 lines. My high school prom had a more detailed budget than the Pan Am Games does.

The tabling of the budget only proves us right; it’s a spending budget, not a book-balancing budget—spending increases by \$8.4 billion in this budget. That overspending will add up to \$42 billion to our debt in the future. That’s as much as \$1 billion committed to the NDP spend initiatives in order to buy their support. And

by the way, they don’t think that’s bad; they think it’s good—“Everybody’s got it. What the heck, let’s just have debt.”

Luckily for Ontarians, the PC Party has been paying attention. We’ve been taking our job seriously. It came as no surprise to us when the Liberals kept doing the same things they’ve been doing for years: tax and spend and waste. These are not the actions of a government that should continue to receive support from this Legislature. These aren’t the actions that should receive the support of the voting public. And I’ll tell you this, Mr. Speaker: They’re not the actions that the people of Barrie are going to support, not by a long shot. They expect better. They expect better from you, they expect better from all of us sitting in here, and they certainly don’t expect us to run from this debate like the government expects us to.

You no longer deserve the confidence of this Legislature. If the Liberal and NDP coalition had half as much interest in transparency and accountability as they say, they would call the want of confidence motion. They would call it forward to allow it to be debated in the House. I’m not sure why you’re afraid of it. Instead of stonewalling opposition, limiting debate and running from your job, you should face the music and allow a hearing of this confidence motion as soon as possible.

This McGuinty-Wynne, Liberal-NDP coalition government has not earned the confidence of this House. This Premier has not taken her platform or her ideas to the province for a general election. In fact, some of our riding associations had more people show up for candidate nominations than actually showed up at the Liberal convention to elect a new Premier.

Instead, she has continued in the footsteps of her predecessor—in her own words, building on the dynasty of Dalton McGuinty—and adopted the Liberal mantra of raising taxes and spending money that Ontarians can’t afford to keep spending. And they can’t. They don’t have any more.

And now the third party, the NDP, have endorsed it. They might stand in this House and pretend to question the government, call them corrupt and pretend that they’re still holding this government accountable—and “pretend” is the key word there—but they’re not. By supporting this budget, the NDP are explicitly endorsing and giving a thumbs-up to the path we’ve been led down, a path of rising debt and rising deficit. The NDP have given a green light to the path of unemployment in a struggling economy. They’re supporting a scandal-plagued, billions-in-wasted-dollars government. Tell me you’re not.

To cap it off, they’ve decided to absolve themselves of the responsibility of holding this government accountable by seeking the creation of an FAO, the Financial Accountability Office, instead of doing their own duty, taking more responsibility and standing up and holding this government accountable—exactly what they’ve been elected to do. Don’t be afraid of your responsibilities. Stand up for your people. Ontario deserves better.

Ontarians deserve a Premier who will deal with the issues the province faces today. They deserve a govern-

ment that speaks to them and listens to what they have to say. They deserve a government that will take this province on a better path, to a brighter economy and an increase in jobs and a set of balanced books. This Liberal government is not the government that Ontarians deserve.

This programming motion limits debate and pushes through legislation that requires a fair hearing in this Legislature and in the public. It's the creation of a Liberal-NDP backroom deal, and it's not good for Ontarians. It's not good for the people of Barrie. That's why myself and my party will not stand and endorse this deal. We will not vote for it. We cannot support this government. We can't support your coalition. I know it kills you to hear it, but it is what it is. We will not do it. We stand for Ontario. We stand for the people who elected us to stand here and debate this. We will not be ashamed to stand here and debate it, and we'll defend our right to debate it until the time runs out.

1650

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: I rise in support of the programming motion that's before us today.

Speaker, as you're well aware, the reason that we're here today having this debate is that, about a year and a half ago, the people of Ontario elected a minority Parliament. They didn't give the Liberals a majority; didn't give the Conservatives a majority; didn't give the NDP a majority. What the electorate said was that, "We, at this point, don't believe that any one party should run government on its own, and we leave it to the three of you to find a way forward to actually deliver the results, to actually get things done in the Legislature as we, the voters of this province, have to do in our everyday lives."

You can either try and work with what you've been given or you can just sit back and bellyache. Those are your choices. We decided to try and work with what we had been given. People expected it of us. We talked to our constituents. We talked to the public at large. And it's pretty clear to me, and I think to most people out there, that in this process, New Democrats have fought for issues that mattered to people in the province of Ontario—know that they're concerned about employment, about health care, about affordability. In this process, the budget process so far, we made a number of very public demands of the government. They weren't backroom demands; they weren't secret. We put them out in the public for everyone to read and for the government to respond to.

I deal with constituents on a regular basis—those who have gone through university, who have degrees, who cannot break into the workforce. Their mothers, their fathers, their grandparents come to see me to say, "What can you do to help my son or daughter break into the workforce?" We came forward with a presentation to the government, a demand in terms of this budget, to set up a youth employment program so that that door can be opened, so that people can get into the workforce, can

start to use the skills that they've developed through years at school and through a huge investment of time and money. That was critically important to the people of this province. It wasn't a question, in our minds, of a budget that we felt met all the needs of the people of Ontario. It was an opportunity, given the cards that were dealt us by the people of this province, the setup that they decided they were willing to live with, to try and get the best we could for the people of Ontario.

Speaker, I'm sure that you have, as I have, gone door to door in your riding talking to people. When I go door to door, and not just in elections but between elections, I get a chance to really get a sample of how people are feeling and what's really making life very hard for them. The need for quick, responsive home care comes up time and again. People cannot wait extended periods for home care. One of the things that we pressed hard on was ensuring that no one would have to wait more than five days. Now, clearly, if you're coming out of the hospital, it isn't a question of waiting five days. You have to have it right then. But there are many people who, you might say, are not in an acute situation but in a situation that, if attended to, will not become acute—sort of mid-care. Those people waiting months and months means that their health will deteriorate. Their ability to live on their own will decline. Their quality of life will be eroded. Frankly, that issue is one that came up time and again, not just at the door but also, when I go to seniors' buildings in my riding, when I have meetings with seniors, they say, "We like living in our units. We don't want to be in a nursing home. We don't want to have to move out, but we have to have some support. We have to have home care and we have to have it on a timely basis."

When I talk to France Gélinas from Nickel Belt about the difficulties that people in northern Ontario face, as difficult as it can be in Toronto, it's far worse in a situation where people wait many months to get home care, where the level of service is not what is enjoyed in the major urban centres but much tougher. That issue had to be addressed—still has to be addressed. This budget sets the foundation for dealing with it. It's our intention to hold this government accountable to see that in fact what is promised is delivered.

Affordability: I have to say that in my riding I probably have the highest percentage of people in the province who use transit on a daily basis, fewer people using cars. But I know that my parents on Hamilton Mountain—my mother, living on Hamilton Mountain, uses her car. I know that transit service there is not what it is at Broadview and Danforth. I know that people who live in small-town Ontario, who live in Brampton, not a small town but designed with the car in mind, are paying huge amounts in auto insurance to companies that have received billions of dollars in breaks from changes in regulations, and yet those auto insurance rates keep going up. We're talking here about profiteering. That has to be checked. There has to be fairness for the people across Ontario, who depend on a variety of modes of transportation. That is why we put that in our list of demands for this budget.

After a range of scandals alluded to by the earlier speaker—at Ornge, at eHealth and with the gas plants in Mississauga and Oakville—Ontarians want to see greater accountability, they want to see greater transparency, they want to see mechanisms in government that will help stop scandals before they start. We listened to the people of Ontario, we read the budget when it came out, and then, with that new information and with the developments in recent months, went back and talked to people again, which is why we came forward with a proposal for a Financial Accountability Office. We believe that a Financial Accountability Office would bring oversight and accountability that Ontarians want to see with regard to Ontario's books. It would be a new and independent office in the Legislature. It would bring the tools for MPPs to hold the government to a higher standard of accountability. It would give independent analysis to MPPs and committees on the state of the province's finances.

When the Oakville gas plant was first proposed, I opposed it in this Legislature, and I said at the time that this plant is unnecessary, that the government wasn't looking at what the trends were in power consumption, that in fact it was ignoring the realities in Ontario. I have to say that plant was cancelled not because of a clear-headed, clear-eyed look at the realities of energy and electricity need; it was cancelled for political reasons. But, in fact, subsequently the numbers bore out the argument that I had made in the first place, that New Democrats had made, that this government was building a plant that didn't need to be built.

This kind of office could help all of us subject expenditure plans to a scrutiny far beyond the ability of individual MPPs to do analysis. The Financial Accountability Office would provide forward-looking cost assessments so that our ability to stop scandals would be far greater than it is now.

1700

There's no doubt about it that Ontarians want to trust their government. They would like to know that we have the ability to get clarity on how budget proposals will be paid for, and clear about the results that would be delivered to families. The Financial Accountability Office, as a structure, could start to rebuild some of the trust people need to have in their government.

The Ombudsman, that position put in place many years ago, is a powerful position. The ability of the Ombudsman to go in and assess problems with service delivery is critical to the functioning of this democracy. When people see problems in different areas in the hospital sector, for instance, they understand the power of an Ombudsman to command attention and shine a bright light on problems.

We need—and I'm glad that it has been agreed to—to have a Financial Accountability Office to also shine a light on the reality of financial commitments and the reality of impacts of those commitments, negative and positive.

The office would examine the government's annual budget and fiscal updates for accuracy and report back to

Ontarians. One of the things that I noticed over the last few years is a constant lowballing of estimates for deficits, so that the government could look good or better later when numbers came in and their estimates were shown to have been very conservative. We actually need the real numbers. We don't need spin. We don't need anything doctored. We don't need anything fancied up. What we need is clear analysis so that we, and the people we represent, can understand what's really going on.

Like the Information and Privacy Commissioner, the Financial Accountability Office would be able to release order of documents. Similar to the Ombudsman, the Financial Accountability Office would report directly to the Legislature. It would expand the power of individual MPPs and, frankly, make opposition parties far more able to challenge the government than they are now.

The office would examine cost projections for government programs, as well as monitoring spending and revenue in government departments, crown corporations and agencies. It could examine cost and outcomes of government legislation and private members' bills upon request.

Now I have to point out one example to you, Speaker. When this government brought in the HST, it promised something like 600,000 jobs would be created. Well, I haven't seen any evidence of that, and I don't think any credible financial analysis in advance would have shown that. The Financial Accountability Office would have given us, those who felt that this was a misdirection by the government, a far stronger analytical tool to take that proposal, take it apart and show what was real and what wasn't real.

Now people are familiar with the federal Parliament's budget office, and there are similarities to what we've proposed and there are differences. The federal parliamentary budget office is a member of the Library of Parliament. They're not an independent office, and that's a very significant difference.

The Financial Accountability Office would be independent, so they could conduct unbiased financial analysis. In fact, I'll go a step further and say that because they're accountable to the Legislature as a whole, they're in a far stronger position to assert the completion of their mandate, to assert the completion of the task they've been assigned.

While the parliamentary budget office can request the release of information from the government, it can't order the release of information. The Financial Accountability Office would be able to order the release of documents much like the Information and Privacy Commissioner. That is an extraordinarily important power. Even as we speak, the Information and Privacy Commissioner is following up on a complaint I've made about the destruction of electronic documents by senior Liberal political staff who are at the core of the gas plant scandal. The Information and Privacy Commissioner has the ability to reach in to fulfill, in this case, her mandate so that she can report back to the people of this province on what has happened and what has not. The Financial

Accountability Office would have similar powers, powers necessary for proper completion of the job.

For clarity's sake, this position is very different from that of the Ombudsman, because the Ombudsman's office responds to concerns about government services. It doesn't do financial projections. The Financial Accountability Office would respond to requests from MPPs, not from the general public, and it would cost in the range of \$2.5 million per year. This is less than the Auditor General, less than the Information and Privacy Commissioner, the Ombudsman or the Environmental Commissioner, but it would have approximately the same budget as the federal parliamentary budget office, which is about \$2.8 million.

That office was extraordinarily useful in terms of protecting Canadian interests. It was their analysis that uncovered the F-35 cost scandal, as well as doing a solid, unbiased assessment of the long-term viability of old age security. Now, in terms of the F-35, the federal budgetary office estimated the cost of that fighter in the range of \$29 billion, while the government of the day, the Conservative government of the day, was saying it was \$9 billion. It was only off by \$20 billion.

Interjection.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: It was a very good deal. In fact, that revelation was of great consequence to the politics of this country, and it was the federal budgetary office that presented the correct numbers and the government that was playing games with them, the Conservative government.

We need to have that kind of tool. The people of this province need to ensure that MPPs have that kind of tool so they can actually fulfill their task of holding government to account.

Some have said, "What's the difference between this office and that of the Auditor General?" The Auditor General reviews funds that have already been spent. It does not do forward analysis of projects that are being proposed. That's not to criticize the Auditor General; it's just to say that there are very different tasks here, very different tasks.

We face a lot of difficulties here in Ontario. We face a time when people are finding life very hard. The bulk of the population has seen its income stagnant or dropping over the last few decades. We see a huge squeeze on public services. We've seen a reallocation of wealth in this society, upwards, and that has caused a broad range of problems. This budget, in part, will address some of the problems that Ontarians are facing. They deserve more than this budget will give them, but at least there is an opportunity here to address accountability, to address pressing health care issues and to open the door to many young people who need to get the work experience that they have not been able to get.

I urge members of the House to pass this programming motion so that we can get on with the business of this province.

1710

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate.

Mrs. Jane McKenna: It is my honour to join the debate here today regarding the programming motion. In this Legislature, members from communities across Ontario have an opportunity to discuss and to debate different things, but we're rarely debating something that has the power to challenge the democracy that we have and the essential role of MPPs to hold this government to account—and this government must be held to account.

In his first throne speech, our Premier's predecessor laid out the stakes of the day. He said that "Ontario faces a major problem, one that stands in the way of a better future for all of us."

"And it's urgent that we fix it." That major problem was a \$5-billion deficit. The Premier went on to say, "The state of the province's finances is simply not sustainable or affordable—not for Ontario families, and certainly not for their children and grandchildren." He promised that his government "will not paper over this problem with money it does not have."

We are now saddled with a deficit twice as large. Debt repayments cost us \$11 billion a year. This is just one cost of the status quo. Again, there is no sense that this government is prepared to make tough decisions or enter the frank conversations that will bring about the structural changes needed to renew government.

There is no sense that this government is equipped to reinvent Ontario's public services for the challenges of the 21st century. There is no sense that this government is prepared to make tough decisions about the structural change needed to renew government and prepare Ontarians' public service for the challenges.

Change is the only constant, the old saying reminds us. That's as wise as it is true, but in recent years, change has not always been for the better. Ontario's unemployment has surged above the national average for the last six years. Short-sighted policy choices have driven deficits to record levels and piled historic public debt on the backs of our children. Scandals have burned through money and eroded the public trust.

Since the fall of 2011, the Liberal government has come in for an impressive amount of criticism from every corner of the province and from many high-placed critics, like the Ombudsman on the government's secret G20 law, which paved the way for epic constitutional violations but was never followed by any government apology.

The Environmental Commissioner announced that he was astonished by the level of disregard and contempt being shown to the statutory requirements of the environment bill of rights. The Auditor General catalogued the smoke and mirrors of the government's green energy policy, the stupendous amount of mismanagement around the Ornge air ambulance agency and the ballooning costs of the power plant cancellations in Oakville and Mississauga.

The Information and Privacy Commissioner recently criticized the government's treatment of emails related to those cancellations after senior staffers testified before committee that they deleted all related emails, despite

their legal requirements to retain such documents for several years. Before that, she had choice words for Elections Ontario, which lost the personal data of 2.4 million voters on unencrypted USB sticks but, days later, went back to using encryption-free memory sticks.

The case against this government has been made repeatedly and in detail, inside and outside the House. Ontario deserves better, but the Liberal government has proven itself unable to deliver more than disappointment after disappointment. Ontario's debt is projected to climb by a staggering \$24 billion next year alone. The deficit is going to go up \$2 billion next year.

This is the track record that the NDP can apparently get behind. They have become enablers for this mismanagement. It is the duty of opposition to hold government to account, defend the public interest and insist that our government aim higher.

Ontarians expect their elected representatives to faithfully serve its interests above all else. I am honoured to be doing that work on my constituents' behalf, and I look forward to continuing the work in the Legislature. I believe that government must do more to create jobs and kick-start our economy, protecting the things that Ontarians value most, for this and future generations. That's why I and my colleagues work tirelessly to stop waste and hold government to task.

It is clear today, just as it was clear in the fall of 2011, that tinkering around the edges of problems will not answer this province's most significant challenges. It will not solve the urgent problems. It will certainly not get us back on the right track.

As the party opposite has often said, there is work to be done, but after failing the public trust on more than one occasion, this government has lost the moral authority to govern. The government pledges great things but shows little concern for the cost of their promises. This government, which is not really that much different than the one before, keeps piling on the spending without regard to sustainability or fiscal responsibility. We've learned that the Liberal government agreed to the most expensive options as an opening position in the power plant negotiations, agreed to closures without considering the full cost; and as a result of that blind roll of the dice, Ontario taxpayers and ratepayers are on the hook for \$600 million or more. The government claimed that the power generation for those two plants was not needed in the GTA, as it was once anticipated, but rather than kill them outright, they just relocated them at enormous expense.

The Premier and the highest-ranking officials of this government have admitted that these were political decisions, yet the members opposite pretend that this is not deception in these cancellations or the cover-ups around them, that it was just all a misunderstanding—just like Ornge, just like eHealth. The government is unable to demonstrate how these programs will be paid for here and now, unable to offer credible assurance that these programs are sustainable over the long term. It is one thing to fixate on an idea like a shiny bauble and quite

another to make the idea real, make it something concrete. The real legacy achievement is making certain that high-value programs are sustainable, funded and sensibly engineered, not just kept alive budget to budget by jacking IV lines into ministries here and ministries there.

There is a generational shift happening, and our challenge has never been greater. It will demand a fundamental shift for our institutions, but it will also require a real and meaningful shift in our attitudes. Ontario was once the country's economic engine. This province's families once had a chance at a better job and could take comfort in the knowledge that there would be shining, almost unlimited opportunities for their children. That's no longer the case. The Canadian economy has found its feet in some areas, is sprinting in others, and Ontario is out of breath. Ontario is having real trouble keeping up. We are still spending far more than we take in. The debt has doubled under this government and might have tripled by now if interest rates weren't abnormally frozen.

We're throwing away \$11 billion a year because of the massive debt that this government has chosen—questionable design or complete indifference—to load onto the backs of future generations. Spending has increased 80% since 2003. Revenues have not kept pace. Innovation has not kept pace. Job creation has not kept pace. Businesses are losing faith. Rating agencies are right there alongside them.

Taxpayers have, for most part, been left in the dust. They are still waiting for credible answers. They are still waiting for this government to articulate a sincere apology or take responsibility for its actions, without clever evasions and slippery words. They cling to the hope that somehow in this government we step up to accept responsibility for these series of appalling boondoggles, and they are still waiting for the government to shift out of maintenance mode.

1720

We in Her Majesty's loyal opposition feel the public's frustrations, their sense of betrayal and lack of confidence in this government. So we are saying that the grace period has been exhausted. The benefit of the doubt has been exhausted. The second and third chances have been frittered away. We are saying, Speaker, that this government's time is up. Musical chairs is done.

There once was a time when the party opposite would say with a straight face that the old ways are no longer acceptable. It is not simply that we can do better; it is that we must do better: no more status quo, no more maintenance mode. The system is faltering where it is not simply broken. And it falls to us to rebuild government and the public sector for Ontario's next century.

If we succeed—and succeed we must—we stand to reclaim the glorious Ontario we all remember: a period of our history that seems so painfully close that you could touch it and that is also a world away from today's Ontario.

The province's economic conditions could be described as critical. We're looking at 600,000 men and

women unemployed across Ontario's small businesses, and factories closing across this great province. Hope is possible. A better world is within our grasp, but not under this government.

Yet roughly a week ago, the leader of the NDP confirmed her party's support for the Liberals' 2013 budget and, by extension, the Liberal government:

"When the Liberals presented their draft budget, we asked Ontarians what they thought," she told reporters. "Some said they wanted an election immediately; others said they didn't feel an election was necessary right now.

"But what most people agreed upon was that after the scandalous abuses seen at Ornge, at eHealth and the crass decision to spend over \$500 million cancelling private power deals in Mississauga and Oakville ... they wanted their government to be balanced, accountable and transparent."

The leader of the NDP has repeatedly tarred the Liberals as corrupt, but she has been able to look the other way as long as her spending wish list is fulfilled. One of the NDP leader's proposals, an independent Financial Accountability Office, seems to me a somewhat curious request. After all, the province already has an effective watchdog for government spending in the Auditor General. This motion would create a new office of this Parliament without a real debate by this House, and we know without a shadow of a doubt that free and frank debate is absolutely crucial to safeguarding the public interest. The motion before us does not guarantee that. It diminishes debate.

On top of this, to state the obvious, it is the privilege and duty of this side of the House to scrutinize government's numbers and demand answers. Instead, the leader of the NDP is prepared to outsource that work to add another layer of bureaucrats to do the job that the NDP should be doing: holding the government to account. Her choice is an unfortunate one. The Liberal government cannot shake its dependency on borrowed money. Every hour, the province spends \$1.8 million it does not have. Interest on Ontario's debt now eats up almost \$11 billion annually. You sometimes hear people complain about the cost of holding an election, and granted, \$90 million is no small sum. That said, it is a relatively small price to pay to restore faith in government and balance to the provincial finances.

The recently released 2013 budget offers no visible plan to return the province's books to balance. It increases spending and heaps on debt, and there's no real sense of hope for the roughly 600,000 men and women out of work. Instead, the two parties that co-authored it allowed political self-interest to cloud their judgment.

Speaker, it is clear today, just as it was clear four months ago, that tinkering around the edges of problems will not answer this province's most significant challenges. It will not solve the urgent problems. It will certainly not get us back on the right track. As the party opposite has often said, there is work to be done. The NDP may have forgotten, but let me remind them that in the past year we have pursued accountability as part of

our solemn responsibility as the official opposition to ensure that the public interest is upheld. The Legislature has a right to these documents, as the Speaker has agreed. We have been granted our power of oversight in order that we can hold the government of the day accountable to the people of Ontario.

Back in October 2012, the Premier's explanation for his lockout of the Legislature was a bold attempt to change the conversation, but it does not alter the facts surrounding the government's chosen course of action. Full disclosure of documents related to the power plant cancellation was the government's legal obligation—an obligation it has failed to credibly honour. In fact, we have since learned that various individuals actively destroyed correspondence when they deleted entire email accounts.

The contempt motion that we undertook with the principled support of the NDP was not an avoidance of doing the people's business, as the Premier once alleged. Quite the opposite: It was a bid to force government officials to comply with the rules of the Legislature so that we could conduct the people's business with peak effectiveness.

Even before the motion was debated, the government itself refused time and time again to reconstitute the standing committees to conduct the business of the Legislature. At the time of prorogation, more than 30 bills were frozen at committee—waiting for the government to strike committees to get on with the work of reviewing legislation, consulting with the public and moving bills forward.

I was disappointed and saddened over the fall and winter to have to plead the case that the people deserved to know what is done in their name, on their behalf, with their money—roughly \$600 million. These kinds of actions cannot and will not go unchallenged. They should not be rewarded or encouraged for short-term political gain. Ontarians expect and deserve better. That's a terrible way to develop policy. Ontario expects and deserves better.

Going back to the matter of trust, Speaker, the Liberals have told the members of this House and the people of Ontario that they had released all of the documents related to the closure of power plants in Oakville and Mississauga. Ontarians have now lost track of how many new shipments of documents have been reluctantly coughed up by the secretive party opposite. It might be a new government, but old habits apparently die hard.

Despite these assurances, despite these vows, despite all of the scandalous revelations in the weeks and months since, the government has still not disclosed key documents and the cost continues to balloon—\$600 million wasted and climbing, Speaker. Then, as now, the buck ultimately stops with the Ontario Liberal government.

With the throne speech, the ball was in Premier Wynne's court to demonstrate that this was, as has been claimed, a new government and not just a larger one. She alone was in a position to bring forward something, some evidence that the party opposite was capable of bringing

forward the fundamental change Ontario needs. But of course we got something more abstract.

In the end, the Premier found it easier and more comfortable to follow the path of tinkering and more spending that the NDP was urging her for, rather than a fundamental change for the province.

It's clear that the only way to end our jobs and debt crisis, to take us off the wrong track and change the direction of the province is to change the team that leads it. Ontario can scarcely afford another year of Liberal mismanagement and scandal.

The people of this province deserve the opportunity to have their say on whether this government can be trusted to govern.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate? The member for Perth—Wellington.

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: Thank you, Speaker, for this opportunity to speak to this bill. First, I want to discuss a few issues that really matter to my constituents.

I have attended many events over the past week in my riding, and more and more they are asking me when we can pull the plug on this government, and I have to say that we can't do it ourselves. We have to have the support of the NDP, and we all know what happens there—they keep propping up this government. They know that this budget is a political document designed to keep the Liberals in power. It certainly is not an economic document. Next year alone, the Liberals and NDP want to hike spending by \$3.6 billion, and that's found on page 208 of the budget papers. This certainly reinforces the McGuinty-Wynne legacy of debt and lost opportunities.

1730

There is certainly no serious plan to grow the economy or create jobs. In the last 10 years, the Liberals have doubled our provincial debt, and interest on the debt is already the government's fastest-growing expense. We could call this budget the "up" budget: Up goes our debt, up goes our deficit, up goes our spending and up goes the support from the NDP when this government does that. On its merits, Speaker, this budget is terrible, and we in the official opposition would not be doing our job if we supported it.

It is the job of the official opposition to point out flaws in the government's program. This budget is not just flawed; it is a betrayal of our province's future. It is a betrayal of our young people. When this budget is passed, every man, woman and child in this province is going to be saddled with a \$20,000 debt. That's twice what it was when this government took power about 10 years ago. I must say it is certainly not the job—I must reiterate this, Speaker—of the opposition to prop up a tired, ineffective and dishonest government. That's a lesson the NDP hasn't learned.

I think back about 20, 25 years ago to a movie that came out, a very popular movie. The reason I thought about this movie is that I listened with interest to the member from Parkdale—High Park yesterday, and three times in her speech to the Legislature concerning this matter, she said, "With Andrea Horwath leading, and

Kathleen Wynne listening and following, here's what we do."

Interjection.

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: The movie I am reminded of—and I would take offence to that if I was the Speaker—is the one where you see two ladies in a car going over a cliff. It's called *Thelma and Louise*, and I'm sure we all remember that. But that's what this whole budget does. They're driving us to this cliff and we're going to go over this cliff. We're going to have more debt than we can handle, and they know it. But they didn't want to go to an election.

We have plans to reduce our spending and grow our economy. We have brought out a series of white papers that certainly prove that. It would be of interest to everyone that if we had an across-the-board public sector wage freeze, we could save about \$2 billion, and that would allow us time to reduce the size and the cost of government.

We are confronting a ticking time bomb of expensive government pensions. While eliminating programs we can't afford, we should be opening up contracts to competitive bidding, again saving billions of dollars for our constituents. We can also lower costs to businesses by reducing regulations and red tape. We can also return government to its proper role in energy by regulating and planning for a system where companies compete on the best price and most efficient technologies.

We just heard an announcement today concerning the Green Energy Act. Unfortunately, the government still isn't listening to what communities, especially in rural Ontario, are telling them. They're getting tired of being dictated to when it comes to siting these wind turbines. However, the government fell short of saying that they would allow communities to have the power to stop them if they didn't want them in their communities. They just said that we will have more consultation on the siting of these projects. That's certainly not what communities in my riding have asked for. However, this government, of course, isn't listening.

We have doubled our energy costs to Ontarians, and we're on course to double them again. This is driving industry out of this province, and the ordinary taxpayer is getting tired of increased costs.

And then we find out from the Premier that the costs of cancelling the gas plants are going on the energy bills of our taxpayers.

It's interesting. I was subbing in for the finance committee when the former finance minister, Mr. Duncan, was testifying, and I asked him where the money was coming from to pay for these cancelled gas plants. At that time, the figures were lower than what is certainly known now. He said they would come out of reserves. Well, we know that the reserves can't handle that now, so the Premier wants to put them on your hydro bills.

I think it's to a point where the taxpayers and businesses in Ontario are getting tired of all these extra costs and getting nothing for them. There is no benefit out of what's going on with this government.

I have dairy producers in my riding and some people with industries who are just getting so frustrated with the previous FIT program. They have invested all kinds of money in getting in with the FIT program, and they were led to believe that their projects were viable. But in recent weeks the government has just said, "No, we're not doing this anymore." Some of these constituents have invested millions and millions of dollars in these projects, and now they're sitting there, possibly not getting a return on their investments. They did their best to follow the process, and they deserve answers as to why their projects did not receive the attention they should have.

The College of Trades is certainly another thing that has caused quite a stir in my riding. In fact, tomorrow I'm going to a breakfast of contractors and interested people in St. Marys. There are supposed to be, I'm told, over 100 people at this breakfast meeting, all signing a petition to get rid of the College of Trades. Here's another added cost that this government feels that the contractors in my riding and across Ontario need to have. Petition after petition came in, thousands of signatures—"We don't need this type of thing"—and yet the government pressed on with this College of Trades. The justification of it wasn't explained well.

One of the justifications for the College of Trades is that it's for consumer protection and so that all the industries would be on a level playing field. Well, electricians already have an electrical code. They know they have to conform to the electrical code when they're wiring a house. They have an inspector who comes in, and if there's any problem, it has to be corrected. It's the same with plumbing and other trades. So why do we need a College of Trades to tell them the same thing—again, increasing bureaucracy, which this government seems to be in love with doing? Now they're going to have another inspector come out and look at what they're doing. It's more paperwork, of course—that's something that this government is also in love with—and another burden, another cost on tradespeople in this province. Tradespeople didn't ask for this thing and they certainly didn't want it, but it was forced on them.

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I have also received quite a bit of feedback from my constituents—I come from a rural riding about two hours southwest of here—on the proposed new taxes to pay for transit in Toronto. We all know there's an issue with transit in Toronto and it has to be addressed. However, what they're worried about is that they're going to be charged extra taxes to pay for a problem in Toronto when we have issues in rural Ontario concerning transit—roads and bridges—that we want addressed too, and they don't feel it's fair that they may be burdened with this extra tax or these extra costs of paying for something that is a GTA problem.

I want to echo the concerns presented by my colleague the member from Lambton-Kent-Middlesex on Tuesday. He said that for years this government has handed power to unions at the expense of students and parents in our education system. It's time to return the power to teach-

ers and principals in our schools and create opportunities for young teachers who put teaching first. This gets people involved in the teaching profession and gets them interested. However, we know that there are roadblocks to this, the way our education system is run at the present time.

There are many different issues that I could talk about, but there's a common theme here. My constituents do not trust the present government and they are unhappy with the direction that this province is taking.

There's a lack of trust because a political budget was designed to appease members of the third party and not to address the problems we face. There is a lack of trust because of the gas plant scandal. There is a lack of trust because of the government misrepresenting its own energy policies. There is a lack of trust because of the wind turbine issue in my riding of Perth-Wellington and there's a lack of trust because of scandals like eHealth and Ornge. There's a lack of trust because of the government's made-in-Toronto solutions for rural and small-town Ontario.

I listened with interest to my colleague from Chatham-Kent-Essex the other day when he was speaking to this matter, and I want to reiterate some of the things that he brought up. This budget will be increasing spending by \$3.6 billion a year. That's money we don't have. Again, we're going to borrow more money, increase our debt, increase our deficit and put this on the shoulders of future generations.

In 2003, the debt of Ontario was about \$125 billion. In just 10 years—10 years only—it's almost \$300 billion. This is ridiculous. You can't operate that way and expect to be successful. If we have an interest increase of 1%, that will mean about another \$500 million in interest payments, which, as I said before, currently is our third-highest expenditure, and, of course, putting a \$20,000 debt load on the backs of everyone in Ontario.

We introduced a number of bills that were voted against by members of the government and the NDP, and one was the Ability to Pay Act. Municipalities are getting tired of arbitrators' awards to some of our police officers and firefighters and the like. It's getting to the point where it's just not affordable. I don't want to see fewer firefighters; I don't want to see fewer police officers and emergency personnel. But if you can't pay them, what happens? They may have to be laid off, and I'd sure hate to see that done. But it could happen; it has happened before. And yet this government doesn't look at that. The arbitrators don't look at that. They just say, "You're going to pay it, and that's the end of the discussion."

In Stratford it cost them almost \$2 million for their arbitration award for their firefighters. I spoke to the firefighters about that. It took three or four years to get this settlement, and they understand that the length of time that this took to reach this settlement actually increased the problem that the city of Stratford had. If it had been brought up in small increments, it wouldn't have been so bad, but they got it all in one whack and it hurt the city of Stratford. That's money that could have

gone for infrastructure, roads, bridges and whatever else, but no, the arbitrator didn't see it that way, and all of a sudden the people of Stratford had a problem on their hands.

I guess where I wanted to go with this is that we can't continue on a course of continued spending without having some way or some plan of reducing spending and reducing our debt load. That's not here. It's not here, and the party opposite and the party sitting beside me here on my left, the NDP, the deals they made with this government, another billion dollars—another billion dollars. Come on. You cannot continue on this road. You have to look for opportunities to decrease spending and try to get your debts under control.

So far, this government has missed these opportunities. The only way that they seem to try to fix something is by throwing more money at it. Unfortunately, Speaker, we are in a position right now where, if things continue on this way, there's going to be outside forces saying to us, "You're not a good credit risk anymore," and we certainly don't want to see that happen.

We have offered what we think are solutions to these issues, but they're flatly rejected by this government. They will not listen to the solutions we have. I know our leader has had a couple of meetings with the Premier, and our finance critic had a couple meetings with the Premier—flat-out rejection. That's all there was to it.

So how can we support this budget? We can't. It doesn't do anything for Ontario and its prosperity. In fact, it's going to probably get worse, especially if we don't get our energy situation under control. It's just basic facts. It costs less to manufacture goods in another country, in another province than it does in Ontario. We have the highest energy rates in the country outside of Prince Edward Island. So, why would you come to Ontario on those facts? It makes it an easier decision to move elsewhere, and we've certainly seen that happen in the province.

Speaker, I will end my discussion here saying that, as I said before, my constituents didn't want an election a few months ago. They said, "Don't do that." More and more of them are coming and saying—especially after seeing what's been going on this past little while—"Pull the plug on these guys." We can't do that without the support of my friends on the left here, and we've seen where that's going. We need a new team leading this province. It certainly isn't over there, because leadership means spending more money all the time and that's something that this province can't handle. It's something this province doesn't deserve.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Mrs. Julia Munro: I normally say I'm pleased to rise and speak to this particular piece before us, but the circumstances of today make it, frankly, an unfortunate thing to rise today and speak to government motion 19, the programming motion. There are a number of reasons, as I hope I will have some time to explain, why I'm disappointed at having to do this. One of the reasons that I'll begin with is the issue around the establishment of a

Financial Accountability Office. In the short time I have, I want to concentrate on this, first of all, as a process and secondly as a government initiative.

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The question of the establishment of a Financial Accountability Office, according to government motion 19, is that it's to be introduced no later than September 11, 2013, and in the sentence previous to that, it is that the calendar will have us coming back September 9. In other words, this process will begin immediately upon return. Now, that wouldn't by itself be a problem, but then when you read further in the motion, we can see the timeline that has been spelled out for us. I'll just pick out those parts of the motion that refer to the timelines for the bill: "Second reading of the bill shall be called at the outset of morning orders of the day two sessional days following introduction of the bill...." I would just point out to viewers that obviously the government is able to call a bill when it decides to, but the notion is that after introducing it, two days later we're going to have second reading of the bill. Then it tells us that two hours of debate are going to be allotted for this, and after second reading, the committee is authorized to meet for two sessional days for the purpose of public hearings, and a third sessional day, then clause-by-clause. It sets out the specific times for this and makes it very clear that this whole piece of legislation is going to be done as part of a motion. Normally, something like this would be a stand-alone bill, but it certainly isn't being given that kind of consideration here.

It will also mean that the bill will be ordered for third reading, and the bill shall be immediately called and two hours allotted for the third reading. At the end of this time, the Speaker shall put every question necessary to dispose of this stage of the bill without further debate or amendment, and so it will be deemed to have been done.

It just strikes me that this initiative by the government and the request of the NDP should have something more than the most cursory legal process for its adoption. It brings me to another part of this whole issue; I want to address the issue around accountability, because we're looking at putting something through that would have a tremendous amount of power. We'll have a look at that in a moment.

Several weeks ago, I spoke to Bill 11, the Ambulance Amendment Act, and I spoke about the need for accountability and the lack of ministerial accountability that has been demonstrated by the current Liberal government on many occasions. The Liberals' solution to their own problems is to create a hierarchy of red tape after a problem appears instead of watching what's taking place beforehand. They pass a bill or put in a policy and then walk away and forget about it, until it blows up in their faces. Then the taxpayers get to pay for it all.

Now the Liberals, at the urging of the NDP, want to create a Financial Accountability Office in order to "be a spending and revenue watchdog of the government and its agencies." The problem with the current Liberal government is not that there is a lack of commissions to

oversee the work of government. The last thing we need and the last thing Ontario taxpayers need are more independent commissions. What we do need in Ontario are government ministers to do their job by overseeing their ministries and agencies that report to their ministries.

I want to take a digression for a moment to go to an excerpt from the document that was provided to all new members at the time of the election in 2011. Here's what it says:

"Ministers have both individual and collective responsibility. Their individual responsibility is for the actions and policies of their respective ministries and departments. Ministers, and not ministry employees, are ultimately accountable to the Legislative Assembly for their ministries. Ministers are usually elected members of the assembly, and as such only they can respond to criticism from other members," especially through the question period process.

The point here is that it is the individual responsibility of ministers. What we're seeing is a pattern. When we look at eHealth, when we look at Ornge, when we look at the gas plants scandal, it's always the question of, "Well, we made a mistake. We'll do a better job and we'll create some kind of oversight that will alleviate us of further responsibility."

Supervision and independent commissioners: The Liberal solution to everything is supervision. What next? We will need a supervisor of supervision? We have several commissioners who report to the Legislature. The one that most would know immediately is, of course, the Auditor General, but we have a privacy commissioner, we have an Ombudsman, we have an Integrity Commissioner, we have an Environmental Commissioner.

It's interesting to look at the specifics of their responsibilities. I'm going to simply look at what are the verbs in their responsibilities. What are they actually supposed to be doing? Well, with the auditor, it begins with: conducts independent audits, reviews and special assignments; provides information, recommendations; promotes accountability and value for money; and he is required to review specified types of government advertising to determine whether they meet the standards required by the act.

What does the Privacy Commissioner do? Resolves access to information appeals and complaints when gov-

ernment or health care practitioners and organizations refuse to grant requests for access or correction; investigates complaints; conducts research; comments on proposed government legislation; educates the public.

The Ombudsman? He investigates. The Integrity Commissioner assists, reviews. The Environmental Commissioner provides information; is responsible; supports a resource centre.

In general, independent commissioners have a budget. They produce reports. They have annual reports. All they can do is offer advice at the end of the day, and the government can choose to take their advice or to not take their advice.

The Liberals have agreed to the NDP demands as they look at the creation of the Financial Accountability Office. According to the motion, the proposed Financial Accountability Office "shall include such employees as the" Financial Accountability Office "deems necessary for the proper conduct of the business of the office, to be hired by the FAO pursuant to the budgetary limits of the office...."

"Provide the Legislative Assembly ... with independent analysis of the state of the province's finances and trends in the provincial and national economies....

"(a) undertake research into the province's finances and trends in the provincial and national economies....

"(b) Undertake research....

"(c) Undertake research."

What we are seeing, then, is, quite simply, all of these people have these responsibilities. None of them have a ministerial responsibility.

The point is that what we are seeing here is an opportunity to push off that responsibility and—

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Are you arguing the auditor doesn't fill a good role?

Mrs. Julia Munro: No. The point—

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Thank you very much.

Debate deemed adjourned.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Seeing the time on the clock, this House stands adjourned until Monday, June 3, at 10:30 a.m.

The House adjourned at 1800.

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Bartolucci, Rick (LIB)	Sudbury	
Berardinetti, Lorenzo (LIB)	Scarborough Southwest / Scarborough-Sud-Ouest	
Best, Margaret R. (LIB)	Scarborough-Guildwood	
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Campbell, Sarah (NDP)	Kenora-Rainy River	
Cansfield, Donna H. (LIB)	Etobicoke Centre / Etobicoke-Centre	
Chan, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (LIB)	Markham-Unionville	Minister of Tourism, Culture and Sport / Ministre du Tourisme, de la Culture et du Sport Minister Responsible for the 2015 Pan and Parapan American Games / Ministre responsable des Jeux panaméricains et parapanaméricains de 2015
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Chudleigh, Ted (PC)	Halton	
Clark, Steve (PC)	Leeds-Grenville	Deputy Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint de l'opposition officielle
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Craitor, Kim (LIB)	Niagara Falls	
Damerla, Dipika (LIB)	Mississauga East-Cooksville / Mississauga-Est-Cooksville	
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Delaney, Bob (LIB)	Mississauga-Streetsville	
Dhillon, Vic (LIB)	Brampton West / Brampton-Ouest	
Dickson, Joe (LIB)	Ajax-Pickering	
DiNovo, Cheri (NDP)	Parkdale-High Park	
Duguid, Hon. / L'hon. Brad (LIB)	Scarborough Centre / Scarborough-Centre	Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities / Ministre de la Formation et des Collèges et Universités
Dunlop, Garfield (PC)	Simcoe North / Simcoe-Nord	
Elliott, Christine (PC)	Whitby-Oshawa	Deputy Leader, Official Opposition / Chef adjointe de l'opposition officielle
Fedeli, Victor (PC)	Nipissing	
Fife, Catherine (NDP)	Kitchener-Waterloo	

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Flynn, Kevin Daniel (LIB)	Oakville	
Forster, Cindy (NDP)	Welland	Deputy House Leader, Recognized Party / Leader parlementaire adjointe de parti reconnu
Gélinas, France (NDP)	Nickel Belt	
Gerretsen, Hon. / L'hon. John (LIB)	Kingston and the Islands / Kingston et les îles	Attorney General / Procureur général
Gravelle, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (LIB)	Thunder Bay-Superior North / Thunder Bay-Superior-Nord	Minister of Northern Development and Mines / Ministre du Développement du Nord et des Mines
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Harris, Michael (PC)	Kitchener-Conestoga	
Hillier, Randy (PC)	Lanark-Frontenac-Lennox and Addington	
Horwath, Andrea (NDP)	Hamilton Centre / Hamilton-Centre	Leader, Recognized Party / Chef de parti reconnu Leader, New Democratic Party of Ontario / Chef du Nouveau parti démocratique de l'Ontario
Hoskins, Hon. / L'hon. Eric (LIB)	St. Paul's	Minister of Economic Development, Trade and Employment / Ministre du Développement économique, du Commerce et de l'Emploi
Hudak, Tim (PC)	Niagara West-Glanbrook / Niagara-Ouest-Glanbrook	Leader, Official Opposition / Chef de l'opposition officielle Leader, Progressive Conservative Party of Ontario / Chef du Parti progressiste-conservateur de l'Ontario
Jackson, Rod (PC)	Barrie	
Jaczek, Helena (LIB)	Oak Ridges-Markham	
Jeffrey, Hon. / L'hon. Linda (LIB)	Brampton-Springdale	Chair of Cabinet / Présidente du Conseil des ministres Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing / Ministre des Affaires municipales et du Logement
Jones, Sylvia (PC)	Dufferin-Caledon	
Klees, Frank (PC)	Newmarket-Aurora	
Kwinter, Monte (LIB)	York Centre / York-Centre	
Leal, Hon. / L'hon. Jeff (LIB)	Peterborough	Minister of Rural Affairs / Ministre des Affaires rurales
Leone, Rob (PC)	Cambridge	
Levac, Hon. / L'hon. Dave (LIB)	Brant	Speaker / Président de l'Assemblée législative
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MacLaren, Jack (PC)	Carleton-Mississippi Mills	
MacLeod, Lisa (PC)	Nepean-Carleton	
Mangat, Amrit (LIB)	Mississauga-Brampton South / Mississauga-Brampton-Sud	
Mantha, Michael (NDP)	Algoma-Manitoulin	
Marchese, Rosario (NDP)	Trinity-Spadina	
Matthews, Hon. / L'hon. Deborah (LIB)	London North Centre / London-Centre-Nord	Deputy Premier / Vice-première ministre Minister of Health and Long-Term Care / Ministre de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée
Mauro, Bill (LIB)	Thunder Bay-Atikokan	
McDonell, Jim (PC)	Stormont-Dundas-South Glengarry	
McGuinty, Dalton (LIB)	Ottawa South / Ottawa-Sud	
McKenna, Jane (PC)	Burlington	
McMeekin, Hon. / L'hon. Ted (LIB)	Ancaster-Dundas-Flamborough-Westdale	Minister of Community and Social Services / Ministre des Services sociaux et communautaires
McNaughton, Monte (PC)	Lambton-Kent-Middlesex	
McNeely, Phil (LIB)	Ottawa-Orléans	
Meilleur, Hon. / L'hon. Madeleine (LIB)	Ottawa-Vanier	
Miller, Norm (PC)	Parry Sound-Muskoka	
Miller, Paul (NDP)	Hamilton East-Stoney Creek / Hamilton-Est-Stoney Creek	Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services / Ministre de la Sécurité communautaire et des Services correctionnels Minister Responsible for Francophone Affairs / Ministre déléguée aux Affaires francophones
Milligan, Rob E. (PC)	Northumberland-Quinte West	
Milloy, Hon. / L'hon. John (LIB)	Kitchener Centre / Kitchener-Centre	Third Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Troisième vice-président du comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
		Minister of Government Services / Ministre des Services gouvernementaux
		Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire du gouvernement

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Moridi, Hon. / L'hon. Reza (LIB)	Richmond Hill	Minister of Research and Innovation / Ministre de la Recherche et de l'Innovation
Munro, Julia (PC)	York-Simcoe	Second Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Deuxième vice-présidente du comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Murray, Hon. / L'hon. Glen R. (LIB)	Toronto Centre / Toronto-Centre	Minister of Infrastructure / Ministre de l'Infrastructure Minister of Transportation / Ministre des Transports Minister of Labour / Ministre du Travail
Naqvi, Hon. / L'hon. Yasir (LIB) Natshak, Taras (NDP)	Ottawa Centre / Ottawa-Centre	
Nicholls, Rick (PC)	Essex	
O'Toole, John (PC)	Chatham-Kent-Essex	
Orazietti, Hon. / L'hon. David (LIB) Ouellette, Jerry J. (PC)	Durham	
Pettapiece, Randy (PC)	Sault Ste. Marie	Minister of Natural Resources / Ministre des Richesses naturelles
Piruzza, Hon. / L'hon. Teresa (LIB)	Oshawa	
Prue, Michael (NDP)	Perth-Wellington	
Qaadir, Shafiq (LIB)	Windsor West / Windsor-Ouest	Minister of Children and Youth Services / Ministre des Services à l'enfance et à la jeunesse
Sandals, Hon. / L'hon. Liz (LIB) Schein, Jonah (NDP)	Beaches-East York	
Scott, Laurie (PC)	Etobicoke North / Etobicoke-Nord	Minister of Education / Ministre de l'Éducation
Sergio, Hon. / L'hon. Mario (LIB)	Guelph	
Shurman, Peter (PC)	Davenport	
Singh, Jagmeet (NDP)	Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock	
Smith, Todd (PC)	York West / York-Ouest	
Sousa, Hon. / L'hon. Charles (LIB)	Thornhill	Minister Responsible for Seniors / Ministre délégué aux Affaires des personnes âgées
Tabuns, Peter (NDP)	Bramalea-Gore-Malton	Minister Without Portfolio / Ministre sans portefeuille
Takhar, Harinder S. (LIB)	Prince Edward-Hastings	
Taylor, Monique (NDP)	Mississauga South / Mississauga-Sud	Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet / Président du Conseil de gestion du gouvernement Minister of Finance / Ministre des Finances
Thompson, Lisa M. (PC)	Toronto-Danforth	
Vanthof, John (NDP)	Mississauga-Erindale	
Walker, Bill (PC)	Hamilton Mountain	
Wilson, Jim (PC)	Huron-Bruce	
Wong, Soo (LIB)	Timiskaming-Cochrane	
Wynne, Hon. / L'hon. Kathleen O. (LIB)	Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound	Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire de l'opposition officielle
Yakabuski, John (PC)	Simcoe-Grey	
Yurek, Jeff (PC)	Scarborough-Agincourt	
Zimmer, Hon. / L'hon. David (LIB) Vacant	Don Valley West / Don Valley-Ouest	Minister of Agriculture and Food / Ministre de l'Agriculture et de l'Alimentation Premier / Première ministre Leader, Government / Chef du gouvernement Leader, Liberal Party of Ontario / Chef du Parti libéral de l'Ontario
Vacant	Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke	
	Elgin-Middlesex-London	
	Willowdale	
	London West / London-Ouest	Minister of Aboriginal Affairs / Ministre des Affaires autochtones
	Windsor-Tecumseh	

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Taras Natyshak, Taras Natyshak
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Soo Wong
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Phil McNeely, Norm Miller
Jerry J. Ouellette, Shafiq Qaadir
Jagmeet Singh
Committee Clerk / Greffier: William Short

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Vice-Chair / Vice-président: John Vanthof
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Joe Dickson, Randy Hillier
Rod Jackson, Monte Kwinter
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Ted Chudleigh, Cheri DiNovo
Ernie Hardeman, Helena Jaczek
Amrit Mangat, Michael Mantha
Jane McKenna
Committee Clerk / Greffier: William Short

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Monday 3 June 2013

Lundi 3 juin 2013



Speaker
Honourable Dave Levac

Président
L'honorable Dave Levac

Clerk
Deborah Deller

Greffière
Deborah Deller

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Monday 3 June 2013

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Lundi 3 juin 2013

The House met at 1030.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Good morning. Please join me in prayer.

Prayers.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Monte McNaughton: It's my pleasure to welcome back to the Legislature today my wife, Kate Bartz; her aunt and uncle from Sudbury, Veda and Carl Hanninen; and my and Kate's brother-in-law from Toronto, a police officer right here in the city, Chris Armstrong.

Hon. Reza Moridi: It's an honour to introduce His Highness Reza Pahlavi, the former crown prince of Iran, and his delegates—Ms. Zarrin Mohyeddin, Mr. Reza Pirzadeh, Dr. Kevin Rod and Ms. Nazila Golestan—visiting the Ontario Legislature.

His Highness has been a strong advocate for democracy, human rights and rule of law in his homeland of Iran. Please join me in welcoming His Highness.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Welcome, our special guest.

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: I'd like everyone to welcome, in the members' gallery today, Jeff and Irene Smith, who currently reside in Richmond Hill but are moving to the beautiful riding of Simcoe North, near Washago. They're here with us to enjoy question period.

I also want to say, Mr. Speaker, that today is—I think we're the only two members remaining from the class of 1999, when Mike Harris was elected with a second majority government.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I tried my best.

Hon. John Milloy: I'd like to welcome Dr. Katherine Bergman, president and vice-chancellor of St. Jerome's University, who is with us today, along with Heather Montgomery, director of advancement from the department of university advancement. We welcome them to Queen's Park.

Mrs. Donna H. Cansfield: I'm pleased today—my page Edgar Martinez Chavez is here with his mom, Ludmila; his father, Raul Martinez; his brother Raul Jr.; also with Indera Chavez and Esther Valiente. We welcome them this morning and this afternoon to the members' gallery.

Hon. Reza Moridi: It's my pleasure to introduce a delegation from the Anatolian Heritage Federation: Saadettin Ozcan, Ahmet Tamirci and Fatih Yegul. Please welcome them. There will be a reception during lunchtime in committee room 228. I invite every member of this House to attend this celebration.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: I'm very happy to welcome the grandparents of page Laura from the riding of Ottawa Centre. Her grandparents Susan and Harry Hughes are with us today. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Hon. Charles Sousa: Mr. Speaker, please join me in welcoming Joe Leroux, owner of Amadio's World Famous Pizza—celebrating its 25th anniversary.

Along with him is Gord Lawrence, a liver transplant recipient just last October—considered by the transplant team at Toronto General Hospital as a poster boy for world-class success.

Congratulations to you. Thank you for being here at the Legislature.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Further introductions?

Today in the Speaker's gallery, we're joined by my oldest brother and his wife, Ida, along with their—

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: He looks younger.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): That got me—along with their grandchildren, two of many, Jack and Jessie O'Donnell. Welcome to Queen's Park.

He does look older. Come on.

Final call for introductions?

AIR AMBULANCE CRASH

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The Minister of Health and Long-Term Care, on a point of order.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Speaker, I believe we have unanimous consent to acknowledge the four people at Ornge who lost their lives. We will be recognizing Captain Don Filliter, First Officer Jacques Dupuy, paramedic Dustin Dagenais, and paramedic Chris Snowball. They lost their lives in a crash last week.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The Minister of Health and Long-Term Care has sought unanimous consent for a moment of silence for these four people. Agreed? Agreed.

Please rise.

The House observed a moment's silence.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Please be seated.

It is now time for question period. The leader of Her Majesty's loyal opposition.

ORAL QUESTIONS

GOVERNMENT'S AGENDA

Mr. Tim Hudak: Thank you, Speaker. Of course, our thoughts and prayers and support are with the families

and colleagues of the tragically deceased pilots and paramedics in the province of Ontario. I appreciate the moment of silence from the Minister of Health.

Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Finance. Minister: Do you have a plan to bring in a significant increase in user fees to help pay for your runaway spending?

Hon. Charles Sousa: Mr. Speaker, what we have as a plan is to reduce the deficit, to continue on our trend to continue investing in our—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): If we're going to start, I'll start right away.

Mr. Rick Bartolucci: Tell him he should have read the budget.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Right away—all members.

Minister of Finance.

Hon. Charles Sousa: Mr. Speaker, we have a plan to continue to invest in our youth, continue investing in infrastructure—and continuing to ensure that we have a competitive society and renewing our economy. We're going to control our spending, below 1% growth year over year, as we've been doing, and we look to the opposition to continue to support those initiatives which are going to make us competitive in the long term.

1040

It's critical that we take a holistic approach to the things that we're doing, one of which is providing confidence, and that is why our budget has been well received by the very markets that are looking at what we are doing.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Tim Hudak: I don't think the minister answered my pretty direct and simple question.

Minister, we're very concerned that we've seen decisions from the Wynne government basically to cave into the teachers' unions, which are spending hundreds of millions of dollars in more union contracts. You tossed out the wage freeze. There's no mention of arbitration reform in your budget. And you've increased spending with 20 brand new promises, including a billion dollars to buy the support of the NDP.

The minister says the deficit comes down. Actually, Minister, your deficit goes up in this fiscal year. I'm worried now that ordinary Ontario families, men and women, are going to have to pay the consequences of your decisions to throw more and more money at every problem under the sun.

I'll ask the minister again very clearly: Do you have a plan to increase user fees on families and businesses by almost \$300 million? Yes or no?

Hon. Charles Sousa: Mr. Speaker, our plan is working. We've beaten our targets year over year—\$5 billion last year alone—because of some of the very restraints that we've taken. And we're already ahead for next year. So we're taking steps to transform the way we provide public service.

Ontario is the lowest-per-capita cost government in Canada because of the steps that we've taken. We're on a path to balance by 2017-18, and that is what's critical.

We need all sides of the House working together for the benefit of the people of Ontario. Don't take extreme measures, Mr. Speaker. We're adopting a lot of measures to control our spending, but we're not going to jeopardize the sensitive recovery in this province. We're going to work in a balanced approach.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary.

Mr. Tim Hudak: The minister has twice dodged a very straightforward question: Are you planning to increase user fees on average Ontario families and on businesses? I suspect it means that he does plan to do so.

Minister, we've already heard your musing about increasing the HST, increasing gas taxes. You've increased spending. The consequences of all this mean that taxes are going to go up under a Liberal-NDP coalition and the deficit actually gets larger. I want to know why the finance minister thinks that Ontario families need to keep tightening their belts when he refuses to tighten their belt one single notch.

So let me ask the minister again: I think that's a tacit admission you're going to ramp up user fees, so if that's the case, when were you planning to announce to Ontarians that you're increasing user fees by \$270 million?

Hon. Charles Sousa: We've put out a number of initiatives to support economic growth. We have over 400,000 net new jobs as a result of the programs we've put in place. We're continuing to invest in our youth. We're going to continue to invest in capital infrastructure and in public transit. And we'll do so for the benefit of our long-term success. This is not about election-cycle politics, Mr. Speaker. We can't think short-term. We've got to look at the long-term play.

That is exactly what this budget talks about. It talks about our future. Inasmuch as it talks about the fiscal constraints that we're taking now, we also have to look at where we're going to be in years to come. I would look to the member opposite to support that initiative, because it's imperative that we look for Ontario's long-term benefit.

During my couple of days that I've had with investors in other parts of the world, they appreciate the steps that we've taken in Ontario to look long-term, and we'll continue to do so.

GOVERNMENT'S AGENDA

Mr. Tim Hudak: Back to the Minister of Finance: The problem is that the long term means you've saddled our kids and our grandkids with \$270 billion of debt. The long term means that you've doomed our province to underperforming, to mediocrity, to steady decline, where the PC plan will see Ontario surge ahead to be a leader in North America in jobs, to actually restore hope to those who have lost hope.

The minister says that his plan is to actually create jobs in the province, but I ask you, Minister, how is

bringing in photo radar going to bring a single new job back to the province of Ontario? Is that actually part of your plan?

Hon. Charles Sousa: It appears to me that the member opposite didn't read the budget, because we didn't put tax increases in that budget. What we did do is continue to find ways to make our—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I think maybe I'll go to individuals now. The member from Kitchener-Conestoga.

Minister?

Hon. Charles Sousa: In fact, we've cut taxes over a number of years. We are one of the lowest-tax jurisdictions in North America when it comes to small business, when it comes to corporate and when it comes to consumers. We recognize how important it is to ensure that Ontario continue to be an attractive place to do business and to invest. We'll continue on that path. We'll continue to find ways to make Ontario even more competitive.

But what is imperative, once again, is that we work together for that end. We cannot take excessive measures. Across-the-board cuts that will hamper that growth are also problematic. We heard that loud and clear from the investors that we've been speaking to around the world who are looking to Ontario. Austerity measures, extreme measures—that is a reaction to the markets and we won't be—I'll answer more in supplementary, Speaker.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Tim Hudak: Of course, we read through every detail of the budget. Nowhere in the budget was there mention of this new tax grab or user fees. Nowhere did the words "photo radar" appear, Minister. Hopefully, you read your own budget or you have some other document.

Maybe I do have that document. I'll ask one of the pages to come forward for a sec, if you could, and take this over to the Minister of Finance. It's called 2013-14 Non-Tax Revenue (NTR) Proposals, and I'll ask the minister to look at page 7. Page 7, Minister, refers to a new fee on our telephone bills, it refers to the expansion of red-light cameras, and it refers to the reintroduction of photo radar in the province of Ontario.

The minister says his goal is to create jobs in our province. I'll ask you again: How does photo radar bring any jobs to Ontario? And can you tell us today how much more money will you fleece from people's pockets with your photo radar proposal?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Be seated, please. Thank you.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Smile, Charles. You're on Candid Camera.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I promised and I will: The member from Renfrew, come to order, please.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Durham, come to order, please.

Hon. Charles Sousa: Mr. Speaker, we've made no commitments of the sort. These may be reactions, could be proposals, could be recommendations; they could be things that are being reviewed, but they are not commitments that we've made. The commitments that we've made are highlighted in that budget. The budget speaks to where we stand and where we're going. That is what we should be concerned about.

The member opposite wants to make things up and wants to suggest and muse about what possibilities may occur, but I can tell you those are the discussions that we should be having. This is what we want to discuss. We've made it clear that we will have discussions before we make any determination.

But what's important is that we continue to invest in our province. That commitment we've made, and that is what we'll continue to do.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary.

Mr. Tim Hudak: Respectfully, Minister, we're not making this stuff up. That's your document; it's a treasury board document. You sit on that committee.

I have to say I'm a little concerned that you initially weren't admitting that you've seen this document or that these proposals were there, and you say that they're simply proposals. In fact, on page 3 of your own document, you've already agreed to increasing fees and taxes across the province, and you're looking further. So it's [inaudible] to tell, the Liberals are so hungry for more taxes and fees. So is this a proposal? Is it a given idea? Is it a dialogue? Is it a conversation?

Minister, if these are not real items, if this is some fictitious document, will you then rule out today—no photo radar, no expansion of red-light cameras and no new tax on our telephone and cell phone bills? Will you simply rule that out and say we can't afford it?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Be seated, please. Thank you.

Minister?

Mr. Rob E. Milligan: Just say no. Just say no.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Northumberland will come to order.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The next time I get advice on that side, I'll talk to you as well.

Minister of Finance.

Hon. Charles Sousa: These are in fact proposals, as the member opposite has reviewed—as a result, I presume, because of the justice committee's release of confidential reports. So be it.

But our budget is on plan, and this is exactly what we want to see happen. These are just documents that officials have been planning and have been suggesting. No determination has been made.

1050

So I would say to the member opposite, let's concentrate on what decisions have been agreed to and we have decided to do and that is in this budget. Let's stick to that

plan, a plan that is working and a plan that is being well received by world markets, I may add, because they see Ontario as having strong fundamentals. The member opposite should be proud of that, as are Ontarians. We'll continue to support that.

LONG-TERM CARE

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is to the Minister of Health. In 2010 the government promised that every one of Ontario's 600 long-term-care homes would receive a thorough inspection. Can the minister tell us how many have been inspected?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Well, I can tell you that since 2010—since the proclamation—there have been more than 6,700 inspections of our 634 long-term-care homes. Last year there were 2,347 inspections. I can tell you that we demand nothing but the highest quality in our long-term-care homes. We owe it to the people who are residents there to provide the highest-quality care.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Perhaps the minister didn't hear the question. The question was about thorough inspections. The question was very specific to thorough inspections. Since 2010, only 123 of 600 homes have received the thorough inspection that the government promised would happen annually. That's less than 25%. That is not a passing grade. Does the minister think it's fair for residents and their families to leave three out of four homes without their annual thorough inspection?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I need to make this very, very clear: Every long-term-care home in the province has an inspector in that home at least every year. On average it's 3.7 times that an inspector is in a home. Our homes are thoroughly inspected. Our homes are carefully inspected. Yes, it is true that homes where there are complaints and where there are critical incidents get those inspections more quickly, but every home has an inspection at least once a year and on average far more often than that.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: I'm going to pass the minister over, through a page, a slide from a slide deck from her ministry that says very clearly that the resident quality inspection is "the new annual inspection methodology for Ontario. All homes are to receive their first annual inspection under the" Long-Term Care Homes Act "by December 31, 2011."

Now, I'm talking about proactive inspections. The ministry slide deck talks about proactive inspections. The minister tries to fool around with the numbers by talking about complaint-based inspections. That's not what the people of this province deserve.

The government says they plan to eventually conduct thorough inspections of all homes. I want to know from the minister today: Is she going to set a date when these actual thorough investigations are going to take place in every single long-term-care home in this province on a proactive basis?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Let me repeat: There is an inspection of every home at least every year. On average, a home is inspected 3.7 times per year. Our inspectors are in those homes, and they respond to complaints. I want to stress that it's very important that people understand that we have zero tolerance for abuse and neglect in our long-term-care homes, and we urge everyone who is in a long-term-care home, be they a resident, a family member, a staff member or a visitor, that if they have issues they think need to be inspected, they must report those and we will inspect those. We've increased the number of inspectors working in our long-term-care homes, and we will continue to provide very high-quality inspections in long-term care.

LONG-TERM CARE

Ms. Andrea Horwath: It's pretty disappointing that the Liberals once again are proving the old adage that figures lie and liars figure. People are concerned about the lack of protection—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I understand what the member is trying to say, but I still think it's what you can't say directly that you try to say indirectly. So I'd ask the member to withdraw.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: I withdraw. My next—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Who is your question to, please?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: I just said, to the Minister of Health.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I didn't hear it, because there were some people talking. Thank you very much.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: People are concerned about the lack of protection for vulnerable seniors living in care, and the fact that the government is not providing the oversight that they promised to provide.

The London Free Press reports that the ministry is now urging homes to inspect themselves. Is this seriously the minister's plan, to simply let homes in this province inspect themselves?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I'm afraid that the member opposite is taking a very serious question and torquing it to her political advantage. I think that's wrong. I think that's disrespectful of the seniors and others who live in our long-term-care homes.

There are a range of initiatives under way to improve the quality in long-term-care homes. Many of our long-term-care homes are very deeply engaged in improving the quality of the care that they are delivering. I have personally met with front-line workers in long-term-care homes who are very excited to be part of the quality improvement process called Residents First that is under way in long-term-care homes.

We're all in this together. It's important that everybody is part of improving the quality of care. Yes, there is a role for government inspection, but there is far more

that must be and is being done to improve quality in long-term care.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: What I'm doing is simply doing my job. Perhaps the minister should try doing her job.

The government was very clear. They were very clear when they promised seniors and their families a thorough annual inspection of every long-term-care home in this province. It was their promise. The ministry said, "All homes are to receive their first annual inspection under the" Long-Term Care Homes Act "by December 31, 2011."

This wasn't a commitment to let homes inspect themselves or to do a cursory review. Is the minister going to admit today that she broke her promise and that the government once again broke their promise to seniors and their loved ones? More importantly—most importantly—is she going to do something about it?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: As I said earlier, we have increased the number of inspectors who now have been trained, who are doing inspections in our long-term-care homes.

But that is only part of what we need to be doing. One of the most exciting things that is happening in our long-term-care homes is the addition of highly trained people, through Behavioural Supports Ontario, who are trained to look after people with dementia. We know that as people develop dementia, their needs change; the care that they need changes. It's vitally important that our staff are trained to deal with people with behavioural challenges, including dementia. We've added 500 new trained people, through Behavioural Supports Ontario, so they can provide the most appropriate care.

What we are finding, through BSO, is that the number of challenging events actually declines because staff know how to care for people with dementia.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Here are the facts for seniors in long-term care and the families that love them: The government promised that every home would be subject to a thorough inspection by December 31, 2011. Speaker, it's now 2013, and only 123 of 600 homes have had that inspection occur.

Instead of admitting that they failed to deliver on a simple promise to vulnerable seniors and their families, the government says that the homes can inspect themselves. Does the minister really think that that's keeping a promise?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Let me go back to say that every home is inspected at least once a year. On average, there are 3.7 inspections per year.

We have added inspectors. When we were elected, we had 59 inspectors. There are now 80, including seven more who were hired last year.

We have zero tolerance in our homes for abuse and neglect. We passed a new long-term-care act that homes have to develop and implement a policy to promote zero tolerance of abuse and neglect of residents. Homes have

a duty to protect residents from abuse by anyone and to ensure that residents are not neglected. It is mandatory for homes to report abuse of a resident, and it is mandatory for the home to contact the police immediately when there is an alleged, suspected or witnessed incident of abuse or neglect in a home.

This is a serious issue, Speaker. We are dealing with it.

GOVERNMENT SPENDING

Mr. Peter Shurman: To the Minister of Finance: Minister, just because you bury the facts doesn't mean that they don't exist. In the 40 boxes of gas plant documents received on Wednesday, May 29, your government's appetite and plans to spend are evident on every single page. However, we have yet to uncover one document asking any ministries to reduce spending. There isn't one page devoted to any directive on saving money. Leadership starts at the top, and if the boss doesn't ask for restraint, it certainly isn't going to happen.

1100

In my two budgets as critic for finance, I have never seen any Liberal government actually look for ways to cut waste and excess spending. You only create new ways to fleece taxpayers and to cover up scandals and misadventures. What is in these documents proves that. You don't really have Ontario taxpayers' best interests at heart, do you?

Minister, is there a corresponding document listing potential places to save money?

Hon. Charles Sousa: Wow. So, Mr. Speaker, they're referring to documents that have no reference to the gas plants, and yet, now they're using those documents to uncover things that are only talking about a proportionate amount of what it is that we're doing.

The member opposite should know this: Our program spending has been below 1% year over year. It is why we have been able to exceed our targets by \$5 billion last year. We've been able to reduce \$21 billion over the last four years. We've adopted many of Don Drummond's recommendations. We dedicated a whole chapter of the budget around that, and we're well over 60% on those, as well.

The member opposite should also know this: 15 of the ministries actually spent less than they were budgeted for. They are doing their job. We're doing what's necessary to support the people of Ontario, and we look to you to also support us in trying to work for the benefit of Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Peter Shurman: With respect, Speaker, that just doesn't wash. The first line of the document I'm holding in my hands, which the minister has, says, "Ministries were asked to develop the following non-tax revenue components as part of their 2013-14 results-based plans," so it came from an ask.

Minister, your government shows every sign of being addicted to spending, and you need help. It's unbeliev-

able that, on the heels of a scandal costing taxpayers \$575 million and counting, you and your government have the audacity to look to taxpayers to cough up more. This government is abjectly incapable of cutting costs.

Last week, my colleague from Newmarket–Aurora proposed a select committee to help you find savings, and he was serious. I have an idea. Here's an idea: The clowns you have put in charge at Metrolinx could easily save \$100 million if they didn't drop a half-kilometre of Highway 7 down into Thornhill and create a new St. Clair disaster. If you really want to control costs, try the select committee and try eliminating the Highway 7—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

Minister of Finance.

Hon. Charles Sousa: Well, my goodness. The member opposite just cited Highway 407. Really? Highway 407? You're the team that sold Highway 407—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Order.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Order.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Order.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock, please. I'm going to remind members of two things. One, please refrain from calling people by their name; we have a tradition that you identify them either by their title or by their riding.

The second thing I'd like to remind you of is that anyone who makes any kind of statement that requires correcting can correct their own record, and we'll leave it at that.

Minister of Finance, please finish.

Hon. Charles Sousa: The members opposite gave away the 407, an annuity that today would have been a great revenue source for the province of Ontario. Furthermore, it should be noted that Ontario is the lowest-cost-per-capita government in Canada because of the steps and the initiatives that we've taken, and we'll continue to do that.

But, more distressing than that, the members opposite are receiving material to the justice committee, material that we've openly and transparently provided, because of the fact that they didn't want anything redacted. As a result, they're making reference to material that doesn't pertain—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. New question.

LONG-TERM CARE

M^{me} France Gélinas: Before I start my question, I want to express my best thoughts and prayers to the families, friends and co-workers of Captain Don Filliter, from my riding, First Officer Jacques Dupuy, and paramedics Chris Snowball and Dustin Dagenais, who died on Friday.

To the Minister of Health: It is obvious that the idea of self-inspection of long-term-care homes won't be enough

to prevent future abuse from occurring. Families are seeing loved ones abused in our long-term-care homes. Ontarians are reading about a resident in a Scarborough long-term-care home who was killed in March of this year. There is no way the minister can say that her government's neglect of annual, thorough inspections is without consequences.

Does the minister agree that it is time for real oversight of our health care system?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Let me repeat: Our long-term-care homes are heavily regulated and heavily inspected. On average, every home has an inspector in it 3.7 times a year.

It is true that where there are complaints, the inspectors go; where there are critical incidents reported, the inspectors go in, but they do get into every home at least once a year and, on average, far more than that.

We are all committed to doing everything we can to improve the quality of care, and I think it is especially important that long-term-care homes now are very much engaged in the improvement of quality in their long-term-care homes. They're measuring quality and they're working to improve quality. That's exactly what should be happening.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

M^{me} France Gélinas: Ontarians are worried and they are fearful. They want to see real oversight of the health care system. We suggested that the province ask the Ombudsman to oversee health care, but rather than give people an advocate who would be on their side, the Premier dug in her heels. Now Ontarians are learning that the government is failing to conduct their annual required oversight of long-term-care homes—the oversight that they promised. If the minister refuses to provide Ombudsman oversight of our health care system, what is our solution to guarantee seniors' safety in our long-term-care homes?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Our loved ones in long-term care deserve nothing but the highest-quality care, and that is a commitment that I make and that our government makes to every resident of long-term care and to their loved ones. We are working very hard to make our homes as safe as possible, and there is a Long-Term Care Task Force on Resident Care and Safety. They report back every six months on the recommendations that have been made and the action in response to those recommendations.

Our Long-Term Care Homes Act includes whistleblower protection for employees who are coming forward with concerns about the level of care in those homes. We passed legislation to allow for stronger enforcement and better inspections of long-term-care homes, and under this legislation we are seeing an improvement in the care that is being delivered in our long-term-care homes.

COLLABORATION IN RESEARCH AND INNOVATION

Ms. Dipika Damerla: My question is for the Minister of Research and Innovation. As Ontarians, we have much

to be proud of. For instance, when it comes to the economy, we are one of the few jurisdictions that dominates not one sector, not two sectors, but several sectors. The auto sector, information technology, aerospace and pharma are just a few examples of the sectors that we actually dominate worldwide. But it's really important that we leverage this great strength that we have by making sure that these sectors collaborate with each other.

My question to the minister: What is this government doing to foster collaboration across sectors to ensure that we continue to be the best jurisdiction in the world?

Hon. Reza Moridi: I would like to thank the member from Mississauga East–Cooksville for that question.

Our government recognizes the importance of fostering collaboration among our researchers and also our industry partners. Our Commercialization and Innovation Voucher program will help give entrepreneurs and their businesses access to innovation and also the productivity and commercialization services available to them in our research institutions.

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With our \$493-million investment in Ontario Centres of Excellence we are helping to connect industry to Ontario's research and innovation institutions.

Last week, I had the opportunity to participate in the Ontario Centres of Excellence Discovery conference. This conference was hugely successful, with more than 2,500 attendees and the largest show floor to date, with 350 exhibitors.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Dipika Damerla: Thank you, Minister. Speaker, it's great to hear that our government is investing and using best practices for sharing ideas and resources across sectors.

One example is our government's \$100-million investment in the Ontario Brain Institute, one that shows how we can make gains through collaboration. This investment is supporting a network of data on brain diseases across disciplines. Researchers will be able to turn information into clinical application and commercialization opportunities.

Mr. Speaker, through you to the Minister of Research and Innovation: What other collaborative initiatives is the government taking part in?

Hon. Reza Moridi: I want to thank again the member for that question. During the Discovery conference last week, we announced a joint Ontario Centres of Excellence and Ontario Brain Institute fellowship program. Under this program, we will be investing \$400,000 to provide awards to eight postgraduate students and also early-stage entrepreneurs with \$50,000 each. This award will promote the commercialization of discoveries that help diagnose and treat or cure brain diseases.

Ontario is home to hundreds of top-notch neuroscientists, and it's important for us to support collaboration among them. The research and innovation that is being done in this area in this province is recognized as among the very best in the world.

DRIVE CLEAN

Mr. Michael Harris: My question is to the Minister of the Environment. In December, the Auditor General said, "Vehicle emissions have declined so significantly ... that they are no longer among the major domestic contributors of smog in Ontario." You, on the other hand, told the Toronto Sun last week, "Automobiles are the single largest domestic source of smog pollution in Ontario...."

Minister, who is telling the truth, you or Ontario's respected Auditor General, whose 10 years of service to our province have been marked by honesty and integrity?

Hon. James J. Bradley: I think a previous member of this House, Mr. Norm Sterling—I can call him by name now; he's no longer a member—understood this when he introduced the Drive Clean program in the province of Ontario. It reduces unhealthy emissions of cars by up to 36%. Drive Clean reduces automobile pollution in Ontario by more than one third—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

Carry on.

Hon. James J. Bradley: —just by making certain that cars drive as cleanly as possible. To put it in a bigger context, Drive Clean cuts smog pollutants by nearly 35,000 tonnes per year.

In fact, the Environmental Commissioner says that he has a report before him—"The Drive Clean program has undergone a number of independent program reviews that concluded significant reductions in smog-causing pollutants were being achieved, but that further reductions could result from program improvements, including the implementation of on-board diagnostics emissions testing which is currently under way." That's the Environmental Commissioner.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Michael Harris: Back to the minister. Minister, that simply proves your Liberal government will stop at nothing to justify Drive Clean, even if it's introducing a test with a computer glitch to make more cars fail or inventing stories about the state of our environment to make the program seem necessary.

Minister, let's be honest: If you invested that much effort into telling the truth, we wouldn't have the Drive Clean program, and you know it. Perhaps that's why we haven't seen the detailed cost-benefit assessment of this program that the Auditor General told you to conduct last December.

Minister, can we expect to see a report tabled in this House soon, or will you continue to spend your time dreaming up new fabrications to justify this \$30-million government cash grab?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock. I'm going to offer a warning as opposed to an ask. You can't say indirectly what you are trying to say directly. I'm going to offer the member—please, it's getting too edgy here with this kind of stuff.

Minister of the Environment.

Hon. James J. Bradley: Mr. Speaker, it's really interesting that this question is asked this week. Wednesday is Clean Air Day. Pollution Probe will be launching its annual Clean Air Commute, and the Conservatives have launched their war against clean air. They scorn green energy and want to fire up the dirty, smog-belching coal-fired plants. They want to scrap the Drive Clean program that cuts smog-causing vehicle emissions by more than a third. It's as though they don't know that smog happens to kill.

The Canadian Association of Physicians for the Environment had this to say: "Our doctors are extremely concerned about air pollution. In Ontario, nearly 10,000 people die prematurely each year because of smog. Programs like Drive Clean—which reduce smog components and poisons such as carbon monoxide—are very important to public health. Our doctors believe that, far from being eliminated, these programs should be strengthened."

The Conservatives need to rethink—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

TRANSIT FUNDING

Mr. Taras Natyshak: My question is to the Minister of Finance. Minister, New Democrats have been clear that we believe in a fair and balanced approach to funding badly needed public transit, but imposing a \$1.3-billion province-wide HST hike on hard-working Ontarians is not our idea of fair and balanced. Why is this government so intent on increasing the HST province-wide on hard-working Ontarians?

Hon. Charles Sousa: Mr. Speaker, recommendations have been brought forward by Metrolinx. Recommendations have been brought forward by municipal leaders. Recommendations have been brought forward by the Ontario Chamber of Commerce and by the Toronto Board of Trade. These recommendations are going to be reviewed. We're going to have an engagement; we'll have our discussions. Let us, all of us, recognize the importance of what's at stake here. That is what is before us now.

We have made no commitments, and we have asked for nothing. What we're suggesting is that we need to invest. We need to invest in our infrastructure; we need to invest in public transit. It's a competitive imperative, it's a social and economic imperative, and we'll work together with the opposition to determine what best next steps we should take.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Taras Natyshak: Federal New Democrats such as Olivia Chow have been clear that the federal government has an important role to play in funding public transit, but taking over a billion dollars in sales tax out of the pockets of hard-working Ontarians is not a fair and balanced approach. Why is this government so determined to impose a billion-dollar-plus province-wide increase of HST on hard-working Ontarians?

Hon. Charles Sousa: So with that, we agree: We agree that the federal government should be at the table. This is

a national imperative. It is a priority that speaks to the competitiveness of Canada inasmuch and as much as for the benefit of Ontario. So we agree that the federal government should be at the table. As the member opposite should probably know, we also responded to the Minister of Finance federally, to his question and his determination of how to best proceed with our transit gridlock.

So I welcome their input—I welcome the third party's input, for that matter—to find ways to resolve the issues, eliminate the gridlock, protect our competitiveness, and protect the health and safety of our people as well.

AQUATIC BIODIVERSITY

Mr. Phil McNeely: My question is for the Minister of Natural Resources. Minister, Ontario is fortunate to have a wonderful, diverse natural landscape full of thriving and independent ecosystems which host a range of biodiversity. One of the greatest aspects of this biodiversity is our abundance and variety of fish and aquatic life. This rich biodiversity can be found in the streams, lakes and rivers across our great province.

It is important for Ontario to protect this resource not only for the economic benefits that sustainable recreational fishing brings, at \$2.4 billion a year; it is also important for the environmental benefits that Ontarians enjoy from lakes and rivers teeming with strong and thriving fish species. Can the minister please explain what is being done to protect aquatic biodiversity and preserve this valuable resource?

Hon. David Orazietti: I want to thank the member from Ottawa—Orléans for asking this important question.

Ontario is indeed fortunate to have an abundance and diverse variety of plants, fish and wildlife. In our ministry, there are numerous initiatives that are designed to help protect aquatic biodiversity.

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Recently, I was in the Port Dover area for the opening of the modernized Normandale Fish Culture Station. This is the oldest operating facility in Ontario, and our government invested \$18.5 million for its reconstruction. The facility will now be producing all of the Atlantic salmon for the Lake Ontario Atlantic Salmon Restoration Program, a program that those who fish in Lake Ontario and its tributaries will certainly enjoy.

This restoration project is strengthening the biodiversity of our Great Lakes system by restoring a population of fish that had disappeared from Lake Ontario in the 1890s due to overfishing.

Speaker, we are continuing to invest \$5.5 million a year in fish culture and stocking activities in Ontario, and in working in conservation efforts to support fisheries.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Phil McNeely: Thank you, Minister, for informing the members of this House of what the government is doing to protect and enhance local biodiversity. I'm pleased to hear about the new facility and the conservation efforts, particularly the restoration program for Atlantic salmon and how it will benefit the biodiversity of Lake Ontario.

This province boasts a thriving community of anglers, even from more urban ridings like my own, who are committed advocates of environmental stewardship and aquatic biodiversity. Each year about 1.3 million anglers participate in recreational and sport fishing in Ontario, and I'm aware that this government prides itself on our sustainable fishing practices.

Protection of aquatic biodiversity, specifically fish and fish habitat, is important to many Ontarians, and I know that it is particularly important to the recreational fishing community.

Can the minister share with the members of this House what initiatives this government is undertaking to support local efforts to protect aquatic biodiversity and conservation?

Hon. David Orazietti: Our government is working to ensure sustainable fishing practices to preserve biodiversity in Ontario and encourage local conservation efforts. The prime example of this is the partnership the ministry has with the Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters to create the Community Hatchery Program. The program will help strengthen community-based fish hatchery operations by providing funding to help local groups operate and maintain these hatcheries. The executive director of the OFAH has endorsed this approach, stating that, "Community-based volunteerism remains a key part of fish and wildlife conservation in Ontario." The OFAH has also recognized MNR's efforts to enhance community-based fish and wildlife conservation.

Community groups with enthusiastic volunteers spending their time, energy and money to operate local hatcheries that help to stock lakes and rivers throughout the province contribute greatly to our biodiversity. Speaker, we're pleased to support Ontarians who take an active part in local conservation, which is one of our ministry's highest priorities.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): New question. The member from Nepean–Carleton.

TEACHERS

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to ask a question to the Minister of Education.

Last week, I asked you why you handed over the reins of hiring power to the teachers' unions at the expense of quality in the classroom. You have effectively handcuffed boards from hiring the best teachers as a result of regulation 274, but don't take my word for it. Howard Goodman, a trustee from the Toronto District School Board, says this regulation is "harmful to student achievement and well-being," and Cindy, a teacher with Peel District School Board, wrote to you and I and said regulation 274 "forces principals to hire candidates based on seniority over qualifications."

Minister, for our support of Bill 115, we demanded that this provision be pulled, yet you snuck it back in. Given how you had no trouble rescinding Bill 115 mere months after you had put it in place, won't you please

rescind this objectionable regulation too, so that school boards and principals can get back to hiring the best teachers?

Hon. Liz Sandals: I think one of the places where we differ from the official opposition in our approach is that we believe that it's very important that we collaborate with our education partners. That includes collaborating with all of our education partners, both the teachers but also the school boards. We believe everybody needs to work together.

That's exactly what we're doing on this file. Number one, we're looking at how do we move forward in the future with a new collective bargaining structure that will work for everybody, a structure that will work for the government, a structure that will work for school boards, and a structure that will work for our employees. That's our number one priority, looking at how can we establish a better working relationship—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Be seated, please.

Supplementary?

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: On May 27, you would have received a letter from the Ontario Catholic School Trustees' Association. On the second page it says, "We now face a further erosion of our ability to hire the best teachers for our students due to the modifications to regulation 274." That's the Catholic board.

The public board president, Michael Barrett, said this: "These changes" that you "are making do not rectify any issues that school boards put on the table. It compounds them even further."

Janet McDougald of the Peel District School Board said flat out, "I just think it's an incredible waste of resources."

I guess everybody else just agrees with us because you simply are not doing your job and getting it done. In fact, your own constituents who are teachers are writing to you and asking you to rescind this regulation and go back to a merit-based hiring system that our PC leader, Tim Hudak, is calling for.

You are forcing professional and young teachers out of their jobs in favour of union leaders, who will give their own jobs to their own friends. Don't you think this will affect quality in our classroom and don't you think hiring based on merit will be—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Be seated, please.

Minister of Education?

Hon. Liz Sandals: We recognize that there are some concerns with this particular regulation, which is exactly why we have set up a working table. We have set up a working table in our memorandum of understanding with the Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation, with OSSTF; and with OPSBA, the Ontario Public School Boards' Association. So in fact, there are ongoing meetings. That working table has been set up.

My offer to those groups, and my offer to all the other school board and union groups, is if you can come up with a better version of the regulation, we are willing to

amend the regulation. That offer has also been made to the Catholic boards, and I fully look forward to the parties resolving the issue.

ELECTRICITY SUPPLY

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is for the Acting Premier. Last month in Thunder Bay, the Premier avoided answering direct questions about northwestern Ontario's electricity needs.

Mining companies in the northwest need electricity security in order to invest and create much-needed jobs for northerners and First Nations communities. The cancellation of the gas plant conversion yet again in Thunder Bay shows that the Liberal government just doesn't have a long-term plan for job creation and electricity security in the northwest.

My question is a simple one: Where will northern Ontario's electricity come from if the gas conversion is no longer needed?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: To the Minister of Energy.

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: I thank the member for the question. It is an important issue for northwestern Ontario. I did meet with the mayors from the north several weeks ago. I also met with the task force that is engaged in the community to deal with this particular issue.

I particularly gave the people of Thunder Bay and the north a commitment that they will have the energy that they need when they need it. They know we are working on a solution; they know we're looking at alternatives. We've shared those alternatives with them. We have not made a choice yet, but we will in the very near future, and the people in Thunder Bay will be extremely pleased with the answer that we have for them.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: The Premier said that she's interested in economic development for the north, but mining development won't get off the ground without a ready, reliable and local source of electricity.

Northerners don't need rhetoric, they need action. In southern Ontario, the Liberal government wasted well over half a billion dollars on cancelling gas plants. Instead of making policy on the fly and leaving northerners to pay the price of government mismanagement, when will this government keep their promise to northerners and ensure their energy needs are met?

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: Mr. Speaker, we thank and applaud the north for what they're doing in the area of mining and everything related to the mining industry. The people from the task force include people from the mining industry. I took the occasion to thank them for the work that they're doing. The second-largest contribution to our GDP in Ontario is coming from the mining sector.

The mining industry will have the energy they need when they need it. The people in the north will have the commitment that they will be able to go out and sell the mining industry with the knowledge that they'll have the energy that they need and the mining industry needs.

HEALTH CARDS

Mr. Bob Delaney: This question is to the Minister of Government Services. The former Conservative government never had a plan to implement the photo health card in Ontario. The expansion of ServiceOntario across the province, especially in northern and rural areas, has made access to photo health cards available in nearly 300 centres. Many people still have the old red-and-white health card. They and many health care providers were relieved to know that people can convert to the new photo health card at their local ServiceOntario location.

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The budget before this Legislature proposed investing \$15 million during the next three years to speed up conversion from the red-and-white health card to the safer and more secure photo health card. Minister, how will this expenditure help Ontarians make that change, and what difference will it make?

Hon. John Milloy: As members may know, my ministry is responsible for health card registration and related support services. I think members are aware of the need to convert the old red-and-white cards to eliminate fraud, keep Ontarians' information current and create a more secure and transparent system.

As the member mentioned in his question, and I thank him for it, the proposed budget before this Legislature provides funding for a more efficient health card transition process. Presently, although 76% of all Ontarians have converted their cards, that still leaves a significant number that need to convert it.

I want to assure those with the old red-and-white cards that they will still be eligible to be used, but over the next number of years, we will be aggressively converting them to the photo cards. In fact, by our current estimates, based on the proposed budget, all health cards in the province are expected to be converted before the end of 2018—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Bob Delaney: Minister, people have told me that the old red-and-white card does not offer sufficient protection from misuse and abuse. Even with a rudimentary background in information technology, one can see many ways in which a careless or negligent patient can lose control of his or her health card number, or how a rogue health care provider could use the old red-and-white health card to treat patients who are not eligible for OHIP coverage.

At this past weekend's Bread and Honey Festival in Streetsville, someone asked how they might convert to the new health card and whether that might mean an interruption in their coverage.

Minister, what is the province doing to make the conversion from the red-and-white health card easy and convenient for Ontarians? And just one more time, can Ontarians still use the old red-and-white health card?

Hon. John Milloy: I want to assure all members and all Ontarians that until the conversion takes place to the

photo card, people can still use their old red-and-white card.

In terms of accessing the service, the ministry and ServiceOntario have made it easy and convenient for Ontarians to convert their health cards. ServiceOntario reaches out to individuals by mail, asking them to visit a location in order to re-register their old cards. Our government has expanded access to routine health card services from 27 permanent issuing offices to almost 300. As an example, in northern Ontario, we only had six centres offering the service in the past; now you will find almost 70 ServiceOntario centres in that part of the province. I think this is a significant improvement for families in rural and northern communities who, in the past, had to drive long distances. Now 95% of Ontarians are within 10 kilometres of a ServiceOntario—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. New question.

CORRECTIONAL FACILITIES

Mr. Jeff Yurek: My question is to the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services. Last week, Minister, you belittled the hard-working correctional officers at the Elgin-Middlesex Detention Centre. You continue to say that the safety of correctional officers and inmates is your top priority. However, you knew overcrowding was an issue, yet many cells are still occupied beyond capacity. You knew that meal hatches were a problem last year, and you haven't done anything about it. You knew that staff didn't have adequate fire-related equipment, but you did not procure anything better. You say safety is your top priority. Why should we believe you now?

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: Indeed, the member of the official opposition is right: Ensuring the safety and security of our staff and our inmates is my number one priority. Last week, I met with many representatives of OPSEU, including the leadership at EMDC, and the meeting was very productive. I was happy to hear firsthand from the union about their concerns. We have expedited some security features for the end of June, and we will continue the dialogue with the union and meet regularly with the staff of my ministry. We're all very engaged in finding a great solution for EMDC.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Jeff Yurek: Back to the minister. That meeting should have occurred two years ago when I first told you about these problems.

Last Thursday, the jail was locked down while staff tried to recover metal pieces that went missing following the fires last Tuesday night. Every time the jail is locked down, it creates residual problems. Lawyers can't consult with inmates and, as a result, must delay court proceedings. This creates costs to taxpayers, burdens an already overburdened, backlogged court system and delays sentences for offenders.

Minister, the problems you've ignored at EMDC are now spilling over into other ministries. Will you admit you're not up to the task to do the job and resign?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Thank you.

Minister.

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: Again, Mr. Speaker, the health and safety and the security of both the inmates and the workers, the correctional officers, at EMDC are my number one priority. One thing was clear when I met with the union. They said, "You know what? You're stuck with a problem which they, on the other side, have started." So it's not coming from me; it's coming from the union. They were very, very clear.

The overcrowding is because there was no plan to expand the facilities and to have more facilities built. What they have done is they took every space that was used for programming and put cells in them.

We have a solution. We are building two new facilities. One will open pretty soon, and the other one is in Windsor. We will continue to renew our infrastructure in that ministry.

ARTS EDUCATION

Mr. Rosario Marchese: My question is to the Minister of Education. Students and parents are here at Queen's Park today to lobby against the proposed cuts to itinerant music teachers and music instruction in Toronto schools, and they're not alone.

According to People for Education, students at one in three elementary schools across the province do not have the opportunity to learn a musical instrument or participate in band, orchestra or choir.

Why are students in Ontario being forced to go without music arts education when it is part of the province's compulsory curriculum?

Hon. Liz Sandals: As the member opposite just pointed out, music is actually part of the required curriculum, particularly in elementary schools and in every grade. So the primary way of funding elementary music programs is through the Foundation Grant to the schools. The Toronto District School Board actually receives \$1.2 billion in funding. However, we recognize that for some teachers, particularly as they get more up into grades 5, 6, 7 and 8, they may not have the musical background, so in fact we have provided funding for 4,800 specialist elementary teachers.

Toronto District School Board actually got funding for 626 specialist teachers, so it would be up to the board to decide whether or not to spend that on music.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Speaker, there was a time, in 2003, when the then trustee Kathleen Wynne and this current minister fought the then provincial supervisor, Mr. Paul Christie, who was trying to make the same cuts to itinerant teachers. How things have changed 10 years later when this government is attacking arts education. Last year, they eliminated the Program Enhancement Grant for arts programming. This year, provincial advisers—their advisers—are urging the Toronto District School Board to drastically cut music education.

At one in three Ontario schools, students receive no basic music education. When will the minister put in place a policy and funding to ensure all students have the opportunity to learn an instrument and perform in a choir, band or orchestra?

Hon. Liz Sandals: I think we need to sort out the information here.

Number one, there are lots of classes in which the classroom teacher does have a background in music, amongst other things, and the classroom teacher is totally qualified to deliver the music instruction.

However, if you look at the People for Education information, what you see is that as there has been declining enrolment in many schools throughout the province, many of the specialist music teachers are not located exclusively at one school but actually cover several schools. So if you look at the number of schools in Ontario where there's either a permanent specialist music teacher or an itinerant specialist music teacher, that has increased.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Wellington–Halton Hills, on a point of order.

Mr. Ted Arnott: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order: Last Thursday, the Minister of Energy made a substantive government announcement, announcing major changes to the FIT program, outside of this Legislature. I would like to seek unanimous consent of the House to revert to ministers' statements, to allow the Minister of Energy to explain to this House the changes that he has made, as well as giving us clarification on whether or not municipalities truly have the last word with respect to these kinds of applications. We need to know—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Be seated, please.

The member from Wellington–Halton Hills is—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

The member from Wellington–Halton Hills is seeking unanimous consent to revert back to statements for the Minister of Energy to make comment. Do I hear agreement? I'm afraid I heard a no.

There are no deferred votes. This House stands recessed until 1 p.m.

The House recessed from 1142 to 1300.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

AIR AMBULANCE CRASH

Mr. Frank Klees: I rise today with a heavy heart to pay tribute to four brave and courageous first responders who lost their lives in the service of our air ambulance service in the early hours of Friday, May 31.

What was expected to be a routine patient transfer turned out to be a tragedy that no one in this province will ever forget. Dedicated to saving the lives of others, these four men did what thousands of first responders do

every day throughout this province. They put themselves in harm's way to fulfill their calling in life: to protect, to rescue and to save others.

Speaker, on behalf of all Ontarians, I extend our heartfelt condolences to the families, friends and colleagues of these four brave men.

Captain Don Filliter of Skead, Ontario: Don was the chief rotary pilot for the Ministry of Natural Resources. In addition to his many qualifications, he was a certified flight instructor pilot. Over and above his role with the MNR, Don took on the life-saving responsibilities with Ornge as a medevac pilot. Our condolences to his wife, Suzanne, and his three children.

First Officer Jacques Dupuy of Otterburn Park, Quebec, joined Ornge in August 2012 after flying as a bush pilot in Quebec. Our thoughts and prayers are with his wife, Josée Capuano, and their two children.

Primary care flight paramedic Dustin Dagenais of Moose Factory: He joined Ornge a year ago. He grew up in Kapuskasing, was married last summer to Josée, and was the father of a 10-month-old daughter, Névia.

Primary care flight paramedic Chris Snowball of Burlington: He was a 41-year-old father of two. Chris had worked as a paramedic in Nova Scotia and with Wabusk air ambulance in northern Ontario. Our thoughts and prayers are with his wife, Allie Scott, their children and family.

These brave men were truly heroes among us. Today, we pay tribute to them and their families, and we commit that we will never forget them and their colleagues who continue to selflessly serve us as first responders throughout this province.

CHRIS SNOWBALL

Mrs. Jane McKenna: On Friday, the people of Ontario woke to the terrible news that an Ornge air ambulance en route to pick up a patient had crashed just outside Moosonee, killing all on board. Four dedicated first responders were lost in this tragic crash. One of them, primary care flight paramedic Chris Snowball, called Burlington home.

From an early age, Chris knew he wanted to be a paramedic. He set out on that path right after high school, and in the course of his training at Niagara College, his passion only became more evident. Simply put, he loved helping others.

After graduation, he served on Cape Breton Island for more than a decade, returning to Burlington in 2008 to be closer to his family. His birthday would be tomorrow.

This terrible event leaves behind deep heartbreak but also inspires us to give thanks to all those who risk so much in order to aid and rescue others across our vast province.

I would like to extend heartfelt condolences to all those closest to the victims of Friday's crash but especially to the family, friends and colleagues of Chris Snowball. Chris will forever be remembered for having lived

heroically. May that memory inspire all of us to do the same.

EVENTS IN ALGOMA-MANITOULIN ÉVÉNEMENTS DIVERS À ALGOMA-MANITOULIN

Mr. Michael Mantha: Back by popular demand, I would like to take this opportunity as we near the end of session to invite you all, and all Ontarians, to my beautiful riding of Algoma-Manitoulin. The summer months up north are some of the most exciting times. The Taste of Manitoulin is a celebration of local food, heritage and culture. So drive up on up or hop on the Chi-Cheemaun. Yes, the Chi-Cheemaun sails again. If you're looking for music, we've got it: Manitoulin Country Fest, or good old rock 'n' roll at Spanish Rock 'n' Roar.

Some of the most culturally rich events in my riding are the many powwows such as Aundeck-Omni-Kaning, Sheshegwaning, Sheguiandah, Sagamok, Zhiibaahaasing, Wikwemikong, Whitefish River, M'Chigeeng, Michipicoten, Fox Lake, Pic Mobert, Serpent River, Brunswick House, Mississagi, Thessalon, Garden River, Batchewana and more.

If you like fish, be sure to come to our many fish fries. The Killarney fire department and the Iron Bridge Lions Club fries are so tasty.

How about fish derbies—the Dubreuilville Father's Day Walleye Derby, Sagamok fishing derby or the Wawa Salmon Derby.

How about a pig roast in Wharncliffe?

If you are looking for community events, we have Massey Fair, Blind River, Manitouwadge and Hornepayne Days, and White River Winnie the Pooh Day; the Thessalon and Iron Bridge heritage community days; Haweater Weekend in Little Current; the Chapleau Louis-Hémon celebration; the Providence Bay Fair; and the Tehkummah and Manitowaning plowing matches.

If you like muscle, then the Dubreuilville Strongman Challenge is the place to be.

Puis les petites poutines de la P'tite Patate sont simplement délicieuses.

Or if muscle cars and drag races are your preference, then Vettes for Vets in Desbarats; or the Bruce Mines, Espanola, Hilton Beach car shows; or the Elliot Lake and Wawa drag races are loud and proud events.

Boat races: We've got them, too—Blind River dragon boats, or the MacMan Challenge on Manitoulin Island.

Farmers' markets: We've got them all over the riding—including a rodeo.

Come to St. Joseph's Island for the island gatherings at the old fort. In addition, there are community parades and festivals in Hilton Beach, Richards Landing and Jocelyn township. And their maple syrup—mon Dieu.

Mr. Speaker: Come one; come all. Algoma-Manitoulin is yours to discover.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): My sympathies to Hansard.

The member from Mississauga East-Cooksville.

THE BUDDHA'S BIRTHDAY

Ms. Dipika Damerla: Thank you, Speaker. That's a hard act to follow.

Twenty-four hundred or 2,500 years ago, a remarkable man named Siddhartha Gautama was born in India—so remarkable that his message resonates even today; so remarkable that 2,500 years later, thousands of people came together to pray and observe Buddha's birthday this past Saturday at Celebration Square in my riding of Mississauga East-Cooksville.

The celebration in Mississauga was just one of the countless celebrations that took place all over the world as millions of Buddhists observed this important day in the Buddhist calendar. For me it was a particularly emotional moment to see a sea of Buddhists from over 30 cultures gather in Mississauga. This was the largest single gathering of Buddhists that I've seen in Canada, a testimony to the growth of this ancient religion here in Canada.

Watching the ceremony unfold in the heart of Mississauga with thousands in attendance, it felt like Buddhism, one of the great religions of the world, was finally taking its rightful place here in Canada. I would like to thank the three Mississauga Buddhist temples—West End Buddhist Cultural Centre, Fo Guang Shan Temple and the Vietnamese Buddhist Cultural Centre of Ontario—for organizing the event, and the over 30 temples across the GTA that attended the event to make it a success.

May the timeless teachings of Buddha continue to bring comfort and peace to all.

NEW HAMBURG LIVE! FESTIVAL OF THE ARTS

Mr. Michael Harris: Last weekend, I was proud to attend the fifth annual New Hamburg Live! Festival. Over the years, this successful event has done so much to foster the local arts scene in our community and promote local talent as our young people move on to become professional musicians and performers.

This year, I had the pleasure of taking in the performance of Ashley MacIsaac on Saturday, where I was able to witness first-hand the dedication and hard work of the volunteers who give their time to make this great event possible each and every year. I was also happy to hear of the hospitality of the residents of Wilmot township, who opened their doors, welcoming musical guests and fans attending the festivals last weekend. This event truly does bring New Hamburg together and contribute to a unique sense of community spirit that residents continue to foster.

I would like to thank festival director Paul Knowles, as well as all the people who worked so hard to make this event this year a success. I would also like to thank the venue hosts who were involved: Steinmann Mennonite Church, St. George's church, Zion United Church, and the New Hamburg Community Centre.

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Again, I was truly pleased to be part of this vibrant and vital community event, and I look forward to an even

bigger and better event next year at the New Hamburg Live! Festival.

SKIN CANCER

Ms. Cindy Forster: I recently met with Brock student David Nguyen and grade 12 Notre Dame student Sarah Lukaszcyk regarding Bill 30, the Skin Cancer Prevention Act, originally brought to this House as Bill 74 by my colleague from Nickel Belt.

These students are part of a youth group in Niagara known as React, which focuses on peer-to-peer health promotion and education. Last summer, they created a postcard campaign known as TOAST, Teens Opposed to Artificial Skin Tanning. They collected 2,500 signatures entitled, “You Wouldn’t Burn Your Toast, So Why Burn Your Skin?”

Karen Babcock, a health promoter for Niagara Region Public Health, also worked with React on the postcard campaign. The postcard highlights three things: tanned skin is damaged skin; melanoma is a young person’s disease; and tanning beds increase your risk by 75%.

The World Health Organization now lists tanning beds in the same cancer-causing category as tobacco.

Mr. Speaker, skin cancer rates are increasing. If caught early, there’s a 90% cure rate for melanoma. Niagara Regional Chair Gary Burroughs noted to the health minister that there are over 80 tanning salons in Niagara alone that are unlicensed and unregulated.

In order to protect Ontario’s youth from this deadly form of cancer, I urge each and every member in this House to help pass this bill without delay.

I commend the youth of React and the partners in Niagara for all their hard work in raising awareness on this important issue, and the member from Nickel Belt as well.

BALA AVENUE COMMUNITY SCHOOL

Mrs. Laura Albanese: On May 25, I was honoured to celebrate Bala Avenue Community School for achieving 100 years of service in my community of York South-Weston.

Bala is proud to be one of the original model schools for inner cities in the Toronto District School Board. As a model school, they work together with students, families, other schools, partners and the community to support students in all aspects of life and to help our students reach their full potential.

Bala brings together 290 students from many different cultures and linguistic backgrounds. Thanks to the hard-working teachers and staff of Bala, children have access to high-quality education that exposes them to different languages and cultural traditions. On June 21, for example, Bala will hold its second annual Medicine Wheel Many Hands for Peace Powwow, and we’re looking forward to that.

The school also provides programs to provide litterless lunches, to enhance family literacy, and to help students have positive relationships with their peers.

I would like to congratulate Bala Avenue Community School on their incredible contribution to our community of York South-Weston over the last 100 years and convey my best wishes for the next 100 years.

ONTARIO NORTHLAND RAILWAY

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Since the shocking fire sale of Ontario Northland was announced, our party has been working on creative solutions for Ontario’s north. First, our team travelled 1,600 kilometres to meet with employees and stakeholders—something the Liberal government did not do. We then said that the sale should be halted and a strategic asset review be performed—again something the government did not do. Since day one, we’ve stated that the math of this fire sale simply does not add up.

Last Wednesday, Speaker, I revealed documents showing the finance ministry telling the northern ministry to defer selling Ontario Northland until they had all the financial data. Sadly, the minister went ahead with the sale, leaving 1,000 families with nothing but questions. On Friday I provided ironclad proof of what we’ve been saying all along. This Liberal cabinet document clearly states that instead of saving \$265 million, the fire sale of Ontario Northland will actually cost \$790 million.

This is now causing the Liberals to rethink the sale, but in order to move ahead with the positive ideas we’ve submitted to the Premier, we first need to drive a stake through the heart of this fire sale. Speaker, the Liberals’ own document should be the hammer to drive that stake.

SOUTH ASIAN HERITAGE FESTIVAL

Ms. Soo Wong: I’m pleased to stand today in recognition of the fourth annual South Asian Heritage Festival. This annual event was held this past Saturday at Stephen Leacock Collegiate Institute in my riding of Scarborough-Agincourt. I had the distinct privilege of attending this annual event and was delighted to help celebrate South Asian heritage with my constituents. This year, the festival included some fantastic presentations, displays and cultural performances.

The annual South Asian Heritage Festival also recognizes South Asian members of the Toronto District School Board and the Toronto Catholic District School Board and various community members who have made significant contributions toward promoting student success. Each year, the Excellence in Education Award is presented to those who have demonstrated outstanding leadership and excellence in education.

The earliest recorded arrival of South Asians occurred on May 5, 1838, and since then the South Asian community has grown into one of the largest ethnocultural populations in Toronto.

The theme of the South Asian Heritage Festival this year was “Celebrating Diversity,” a very appropriate theme. I also enjoyed learning more about the history of South Asian immigration to our city and our province,

and reflecting on the many cultural, political and economic contributions of the South Asian community to our province.

I would like to thank Toronto District School Board trustee Sam Sotiropoulos, acting director Donna Quan and all the volunteers, performers, teachers and community performers who made the fourth annual South Asian Heritage Festival a great success.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I thank all members for their statements.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I beg to inform the House that, pursuant to standing order 98(c), a change has been made in the order of precedence on the ballot list for private members' public business such that Mr. Harris assumes ballot item number 38 and Mr. Hudak assumes ballot item number 47.

BOB ELGIE

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The minister responsible for seniors on a point of order.

Hon. Mario Sergio: Mr. Speaker, I believe you will find that we have unanimous consent to pay tribute to Mr. Bob Elgie, former member of this Legislature from York East from 1977 to 1985, with a representative from each caucus speaking for up to five minutes.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member has asked for unanimous consent to pay tribute. Do we agree? Agreed.

The member for Timmins–James Bay.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Thank you, Speaker. On behalf of New Democrats and our leader, Andrea Horwath, I want to take the time to say a few words about the large contribution that was made in this Legislature and this province by Bob Elgie, otherwise known as Dr. Elgie. I note that both his wife and his son, Nancy and Peter, are here, and I want to say, first off, thank you for lending him to us for that time.

Who could not know of Bob Elgie? If you were somewhat interested in politics in the time that he served, you know who Bob Elgie was. Bob Elgie was an individual who was somewhat larger than life. Originally he decided to go into law, and then decided, "Well, maybe that's not such a good idea. Maybe I should become a neurosurgeon." So he decided to go to school and become a neurosurgeon. Then he said, "Well, what the heck. Maybe I should go and serve the public; I should run for office and try to give back to this province and this country what I have taken out."

Bob came from a family with means, as we say; it wasn't as if he had to do this. But Mr. Elgie decided to serve, because he really did think it was the responsibility of all citizens to give back to their society when they got something from it. Clearly, he and his family and his group of friends had been quite fortunate in this province

and this country as to what economic benefits they were able to get from this province, and he thought it was time for some of that to be given back. So Mr. Elgie decided to do what very few people do—what some of us aspire to all the time; some of us who are here hang on. He decided that he wanted to run for the office of member of provincial Parliament for his particular part of the world.

He came here and was, I think, almost immediately in cabinet. Bill Davis was one who saw good talent and knew when to use it—saw bad talent and knew when not to use it. In this particular case, he utilized—

Interjection.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Well, we're going to stop at that point. He knew when to utilize the good services of Dr. Elgie.

I'm going to talk particularly about his time at Labour. He was, I believe, at Community and Social Services for a while, and I may stand corrected on that—I'm strictly doing this by memory; this is not a written note. So if I'm a little bit wrong, please indulge. He was at Labour, and the reason I want to speak to that is because it was at a time when I was involved in labour, not as a member of provincial Parliament, but as a member of the United Steelworkers of America, Local 4440.

I remember many discussions we had within our local and within district 6, which is the district that represents all of Ontario. At that time, Stu Cooke was our district director, followed by Mr. Patterson. Plenty of times we had discussions about the good relationship that labour had with that Minister of Labour.

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We knew that Conservatives were not necessarily our friends, but we had one friend in that cabinet: It was Bob Elgie. We knew that we weren't going to get an easy going of it because, after all, he had to listen to his Premier, he had to listen to his cabinet and he had to listen to the rest of the Tory caucus. Certainly that caucus, I would argue, was not prepared to go as far on labour issues that we would have wanted, or New Democrats would have wanted, here in the House, but Mr. Elgie had this uncanny ability to be able to hear what people had said and to try to dissect it in some kind of a way so that you can find a win for his caucus and his government politically, but more importantly, do the right thing.

I remember some of those fights, especially around the Human Rights Code, where Mr. Elgie mended the Labour Relations Act in order to make sure that human rights became part of that act. As a result of that, this province has been greatly changed. It's allowed people to be able to step forward and to ensure that their rights are respected, not only when it comes to a collective agreement, but as a basic citizen of this province when it comes to the workplace. I think that is something that has served this province, and I think served all of us, rather well over the years that it was there.

He had a really good relationship with members on the other side. I know Elie Martel well. Those of you who know Elie Martel know that Mr. Martel is a very

passionate politician. A former member from Nickel Belt—he was followed by his daughter Shelley; we all know Shelley Martel; and then followed by our amiable and very esteemed colleague Madame Gélinas—he had an amazing relationship with Bob Elgie. I know in conversations I've had with Elie—because I probably speak with Elie more than most people; I have a lot of time for Elie, because he's a person who's quite learned and quite passionate about what he believes in. Over the years I've relied on his counsel on a number of issues, both when I was in the labour movement, under Local 4440 and eventually as staff with steel, but also later when I got elected. He would always talk about how the relationship with Bob Elgie was a really strong one. I think that says something that we should all maybe learn from, that, yes, we all come here with our party affiliation, but it is really about doing the people's work and it really is about trying to find the commonality on an issue so that it's not just New Democrats who have a virtue on labour and it's not just Conservatives who have a virtue on helping the big corporations and it's not just the Liberals on something else, but finding a way to reach across so that all of us can do the right thing. Mr. Elgie understood that it was important to have those relationships because he needed those relationships to be able to pilot those things that were important to him and important to other people in this province.

So what I would say is this: I think if we learned anything through the time of Mr. Elgie being with us, it's that integrity is number one. Always try to do the right thing. Reach across the aisle; try to find ways to work with people. Be partisan when you need to be; that's what elections are all about. In the meantime, while we're here, always try to do what's right by the people of Ontario because they're the ones who sent us here.

On behalf of my colleagues here in the New Democratic caucus and our leader, Andrea Horwath, we say both to Nancy, his wife, and Peter, his son, thank you for the time that we've had with your husband and your father. We say to you that we sure know that you miss him, but the fact that he has left so much behind of himself in this Legislature and in legislation warms the heart; it allows you to know your husband will always be with you, and so will your father.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from York Centre.

Mr. Monte Kwinter: Humble; a giver; a sensitive and compassionate man; a big heart; big vision; a public servant extraordinaire—these are some of the words that people who knew and worked with Bob Elgie used to describe him.

I rise today on behalf of the Liberal caucus to pay tribute to Bob Elgie, a respected citizen, a distinguished doctor, lawyer, educator and a former member of this Legislature who passed away on April 3, 2013, at the age of 84.

It's my pleasure to recognize members of Bob's family who joined us today: his wife, Nancy, who was a school trustee and vice-chair of the York Region District

School Board, and her son, Peter. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Bob was born in Toronto in 1929. He received his BA from the University of Western Ontario in 1950, his LLB from Osgoode Hall Law School and medical degree from the University of Ottawa. Upon the completion of his studies, Bob entered the legal/medical field. He was on the medical teaching staff at the University of Toronto and Queen's University. In addition, he served as chief of staff at the Scarborough General Hospital.

People don't normally give up this kind of career to run for office, but Bob had politics in his blood. The senior Elgie was an opposition member during Mitch Hepburn's government and later spent two years on the government benches behind George Drew. As an only child, Bob was caught up early in his father's passion for politics. He came to believe that by influencing public policy he could continue to improve people's lives. He listened to politics over dinner, campaigned alongside his father during elections, and gave speeches on his dad's behalf while still in his teens. Bob said, "I did what I swore to my father I would never do, and that was to run for politics." It was natural that Bob ran, and won his seat during the 1977 election.

Bob earned the respect and confidence of members of the Legislature from all parties. He was an intelligent, exceptionally thoughtful and articulate public servant who put his partisan interests aside and acted in the public interest. He was always characterized as a red Tory.

Bob became a prominent cabinet minister in the governments of Bill Davis and the very short Frank Miller government. He held a number of ministry portfolios that included labour, consumer and commercial relations, and, for a brief period of time, community and social services. When I got elected in 1985, my first portfolio was as Minister of Consumer and Commercial Relations, so I was actually the successor to Bob Elgie. I'll tell you in a minute what happened to him, but he used to call me and we used to talk about the issues that were there; we had 83 different pieces of legislation that we had to deal with.

Bob was an active minister. The revamping of occupational health and safety, the Ontario Human Rights Code and the Workers' Compensation Board were some of his primary concerns as labour minister. Change at the Workers' Compensation Board was not easy, as the public agency had increasingly become the target of angry attacks from both its clients and its political bosses. Some of these changes included empowering human rights officers with the ability to investigate and arbitrate reports of workplace discrimination as well as making the Workers' Compensation Board more responsive to injured workers' needs.

Bob was also well liked by unions. Any labour minister would envy the great working relationship and mutual respect that he enjoyed with unions and the working people. Bob enjoyed that respect so much that the Ontario Federation of Labour honoured him at a farewell party when he retired from politics.

In 1985, Premier David Peterson made his first political appointment by naming Bob Elgie to head the Ontario Workers' Compensation Board, where he served from 1985 to 1991. Bob was a compassionate individual, extremely sensitive of others' feelings, with a keen sense of justice. These qualities served him well in his new role at the WCB.

In 1991, Bob embarked on a new adventure and moved to Nova Scotia. He became chair of the Nova Scotia Workers' Compensation Board, serving from 1992 to 1996. Bob is credited with making significant improvements to the board's activities.

Bob's interests in bringing the concerns of law and medicine together became evident when he founded and became the first director of Dalhousie University's Health Law Institute. His areas of research and interest included medical malpractice, living wills legislation, adult protection legislation, and confidentiality of health records, to name a few.

Bob returned to Ontario in the mid-1990s. He served as chair of the Patented Medicine Prices Review Board, and was appointed chair of the Ontario Greenbelt Council by the provincial government in the summer of 2005. He was paid \$1 a year.

The fact that Bob chose not to practise law or medicine for most of his career, which could have easily provided lucrative incomes, is a testament that he was not motivated by money and greed. His primary motivation was to leave the world a better place. I understand that the joke among his family was that if he was offered a job that paid less money, he'd take it.

From 2001 until his death, Bob was a member of the Ontario Press Council, which he chaired from 2006. He received the Order of Canada in 2003.

Bob's passions were good food, junky western movies, whodunits and golf. However, his real relaxation was spending time with his family: his beloved wife, Nancy, and their five children—Stewart, Allyson, Peter, Catherine and Bill. Nancy, a child psychologist by training, shared his love of public life and passion for golf. She was his best friend and lifelong love.

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His attitude toward his children's upbringing provides the best clue to the man himself. His wife says they were raised with the attitude: "From those to whom much is given, much is expected," and, "If you're capable of learning, you have a responsibility to do so." And Bob had added, "And that's what I believe."

On behalf of the members of the Legislature, I wish to sincerely thank Bob's family for sharing him with the people of Toronto and the province of Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member for York-Simcoe.

Mrs. Julia Munro: On behalf of Tim Hudak and the Ontario PC Party, I'm very proud to speak today to recognize the life and accomplishments of Robert Goldwin Elgie, a man who served the people of Ontario honourably, both in this House and outside, and a man I was proud to call a friend. Watching us today in the

gallery is Bob Elgie's wife, Nancy, and son Peter, and we welcome them to the Ontario Legislature.

Bob and Nancy spent 56 happy years together, with five children and 13 grandchildren. I was proud to join with his family only a few weeks ago as we celebrated Bob's life at Timothy Eaton Memorial Church here in Toronto. Former Premiers included Bill Davis, Bob Rae, Mike Harris and Ernie Eves, and they were joined by people of all parties and backgrounds to honour Bob Elgie; friends such as NDP member Elie Martel, who spoke about Bob's career. And an impressive career it was.

Bob Elgie served in this House as MPP for York East from 1977 to 1985. A cabinet minister for most of that time, he held the portfolios of Minister of Labour, Minister of Consumer and Commercial Relations and Minister of Community and Social Services under Premiers Bill Davis and Frank Miller. As minister, he made sweeping changes to Ontario's Human Rights Code and to labour legislation. Bob came, as we have already heard, from a family steeped in politics, with his father sitting in this House as MPP for the old riding of Woodbine.

Bob trained as both a lawyer and a neurosurgeon, rising to chief of medical staff at Scarborough General Hospital, but left these two careers behind to run for office. It's well worth pointing out, as others certainly just have, that Bob Elgie could have made a lot more money if he had stayed in one of his previous careers. But clearly, money wasn't Bob's priority. Helping people was his priority. I too heard the family joke that every job he took seemed to be for successively less money. Given that his recent job as chair of the Greenbelt Council paid only \$1 a year, this may be true.

After leaving office, Bob served as head of the Ontario Workers' Compensation Board and the Nova Scotia Workers' Compensation Board. He founded the Dalhousie University Health Law Institute. He was chair of the Ontario Press Council from 2006 until his death.

With all of Bob's accomplishments and the mark he left on Ontario, it's hard to believe he was in office for only eight years. His success and the great esteem in which he is held by people across politics testify to his character and to his values and how he lived them.

One of Bob Elgie's great legislative accomplishments was reforming the Ontario Human Rights Code to make it illegal for the first time in Ontario to discriminate against people with disabilities. Here's a section of what David Lepofsky and the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act Alliance had to say about Bob's reforms:

"Dr. Elgie didn't do what he did for Ontarians with disabilities because it would win his party more seats or bump them up in the polls. He didn't do it for a personal or political legacy. He did it simply because it was the right thing to do. He was a man of great conscience and integrity. For what he achieved for Ontarians with disabilities we will be eternally grateful."

It brings to mind a story that Nancy shared with me a short time ago. Some years before, when the family was

a much younger group of children, the family was visiting in the Carolinas at a restaurant where Freddy Cole was entertaining. Freddy Cole was the brother of Nat King Cole. The family, and the children particularly, were very interested in the music and the drumming and so forth, and as a result, a relationship developed between the Elgie family and Freddy Cole.

Well, he happened to be in Toronto sometime later, exactly at the time when the human rights legislation was being debated in an evening session, so Bob invited Freddy to come and listen to the debate that evening. Of course, Mr. Freddy Cole saw something he didn't believe he could see in his own country, and he was so impressed with what was happening here under Bob Elgie's leadership.

Bob Elgie's dedication to increasing human rights came from his own character. At Bob's memorial at Timothy Eaton church, his son told of being raised in a house without biases. The family once had a guest who made a disparaging comment, and the guest was then walked by Bob Elgie to the door—tossed out, actually, and in a gentlemanly way, I'm certain, but tossed out nonetheless.

Bob refused to join the Granite Club in the days when it refused to admit Jewish members. It's easy to see where his strong advocacy for human rights came from. He was a man who treated all others as equals, with respect and dignity. I think this was the core of Bob's character: respect for others and a true caring for other people.

Nancy told me that, as a trained neurosurgeon, Bob was always on the watch for people with back problems, getting them help whenever he could. In medical practice, he regularly billed far less than other neurosurgeons. A provincial study into doctors' salaries revealed why: It was because he spent more time with his patients. Bob was always able to connect with people, no matter what their background. The trust in which he was held by those who knew them was legendary.

Steve Paikin recounted a story about Bob Rae, then leader of the NDP, being called in to meet with Bob Elgie and Premier Davis when some trust company scandals erupted. He told Bob Rae that criminals were trying to take over a trust company, and that they had to pass legislation in a single day to stop it. When told it was absolutely necessary, Rae responded, "If it's good enough for you two, it's good enough for me." Bob Rae and the entire Legislature trusted the integrity of Bob Elgie, and the bill passed the House in one day.

Bob Elgie's personal integrity was matched by his knowledge and skill, traits that made others heed his views and accept his leadership and ideas. Norm Sterling told me that the cabinet once had to decide whether or not to legalize kick-boxing in Ontario. When the subject came up for debate, Bob Elgie pointed out that a kick carries a force five or more times greater than a punch and that, as a neurosurgeon, he could not condone a sport that could cause brain injury. After he spoke up, kick-boxing was not legalized.

I got to know Bob Elgie well after he retired and moved to Georgina permanently—although Bob Elgie's idea of retirement would be busier than many people's working lives. Bob and Nancy were active in our community, and Nancy is today our local public school trustee.

I've always been grateful to Bob and Nancy for the support and friendship they have given me locally. At one point, shortly after I had been nominated, Bob was asked to introduce me to the guests of the neighbourhood, so he told them that he had scouted out a bit to find out if I had any skeletons in my closet. He knew people who knew me, so he explained to the audience that he had done his research, and he felt quite confident in introducing me as a straight shooter. I always regarded that as one of the best compliments that I could receive from Dr. Bob Elgie.

We will miss Bob in Georgina. We are very lucky to have shared in the wisdom, generosity and leadership he offered to Ontario. Bob Elgie truly loved this province and its people, and his life and work made it a better place. We have all heard the words from the gospel of Luke: "For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required...."

Bob Elgie knew that he had received a great share of success, intelligence, education and happiness in life, and he put in the work to help others to achieve their dreams. He told his children, "There's no such thing as a great person. There are only people who do great things."

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I think for Bob it was not just a duty to give to others; it was a joy. At the end of the order of service for Bob's memorial is a poem, part of which goes:

I sit beside the fire and think
 of people long ago,
and people who will see a world
 that I shall never know.
But all the while I sit and think
 of times there were before,
I listen for returning feet
 and voices at the door.

These are the words of that great philosopher Bilbo Baggins, as recorded by J.R.R. Tolkien. We can only imagine the happiness of a family that honours their husband, father and grandfather with words from one of the great happy travellers and adventurers of fiction.

Thank you, Bob Elgie. We are all the better for having known you. You did do great things.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I would like to thank all members for their very thoughtful and heart-warming comments for this tribute.

I'd also like to thank the family for the gift of Bob Elgie, not just in this place but in the province of Ontario. We will be providing you with a CD of the tributes and a copy of Hansard.

We think that we are better for having known him. Thank you very much.

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

JUNE CALLWOOD CHILDREN'S DAY

JOURNÉE DES ENFANTS EN HOMMAGE À JUNE CALLWOOD

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Statements by ministries? The Minister of Agriculture and Food—

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Or Premier.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Or Premier.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I'm here speaking as Premier today.

Mr. Speaker, I'm very pleased to rise today to recognize June Callwood Children's Day. I'd like to introduce a couple of individuals before I do so, Anita Khanna and Olivia Aiello from Campaign 2000, and Brian MacLean, Nik Manojlovich—if I got that pronunciation wrong, I apologize—Todd Ross, and former member of the House Walter Pitman, who are with us. They're from the June Callwood committee to end child poverty in Canada. Welcome.

This is a day when we are talking about two wonderful people: Bob Elgie and now June Callwood. It's a day when we should all consider the legacy of a great woman, I believe, and strive to emulate her hard work and outstanding values.

The late June Callwood was a journalist. She was an author and social activist, fondly known as "Canada's conscience." She was rightly referred to by many as St. June. Her childhood was marked by hardships, including poverty and adversity, but she took this early life experience and focused on improving the lives of others. The causes she championed included poverty reduction, health and wellness, and freedom of expression, among others. She was drawn to social justice and focused special attention on issues affecting vulnerable children and women.

As a journalist, she wrote about these topics, but her work did not end when she put down her pen. She took action and helped establish more than 50 social action organizations. Everything June Callwood touched was indelibly marked by her love and compassion. She believed that showing kindness was the truest demonstration of strength.

Tout ce que June Callwood touchait était à jamais marqué de façon indélébile de son amour et de sa compassion. Elle croyait que faire preuve de bonté était la véritable façon d'exprimer sa force.

In March 2007, the province's Outstanding Achievement Award for Volunteerism was renamed the June Callwood Outstanding Achievement Award in recognition of her many contributions to Ontario.

In 2009, the province named a day in her honour. Every June 2 is now recognized as June Callwood Children's Day in Ontario. This celebration of her life adds to June's collection of distinctions and awards, including the Order of Ontario and all three ranks in the

Order of Canada. June Callwood displayed a deep love of humanity in everything she took on, and June 2 is a reminder that the biggest impact can be made by those who work together.

In a 2006 radio interview, June said, "Most people will do anything to help a child, and that's the way the human race is meant to be."

"We're meant to be a tribe. And when it works, it just makes your heart leap."

Mr. Speaker, June championed an all-hands-on-deck approach to reducing child poverty. Thanks in part to her tireless efforts, our government announced in 2008 a five-year poverty reduction strategy focused on combating child poverty. I would say "tireless efforts and prodding," because she did push us, and that was a good thing. A year later, after its introduction, this strategy was enshrined in legislation.

Our government also committed to the Ontario Child Benefit, a social support that was championed by June. This benefit is the cornerstone of Ontario's Poverty Reduction Strategy and has helped to lift over 40,000 children and families out of poverty. It provides support to over 950,000 children in 510,000 families, and we have proposed to increase the maximum annual amount per child, to \$1,210 this July and \$1,310 in July 2014.

Mr. Speaker, we're proud of our investments, which are helping to break the cycle of poverty, and so this year we'll be engaging Ontarians in the development of the next phase of our Poverty Reduction Strategy.

We still have a long way to go, and we owe it to June to see the job through. I would say that June Callwood would be the very first to tell us that there is much, much more to be done. In her last interview, she said that great consideration for one another is going to save the world.

June left an indelible mark on all those she touched and on Ontario as a whole. On this day, people across Ontario recognize this remarkable woman, her hard work and unshakable values.

June a laissé à jamais sa marque sur ceux et celles qui l'ont connue de même que sur tout l'Ontario. En ce jour, les gens de l'ensemble de l'Ontario reconnaissent cette femme remarquable pour son dur labeur et ses valeurs indéfendables.

I invite the House to join me in celebrating a champion of the disadvantaged and a day when we recommit ourselves to her cause. We continue to learn from her compassion and commitment to others, and we thank her for helping us to build strong communities across our province.

SENIORS' MONTH

Hon. Mario Sergio: June is Seniors' Month in Ontario, a time to recognize the many ways seniors contribute to the province and learn more about the benefits of living well at any age.

This year's theme, "The Art of Living," honours seniors' unique approach to living. It recognizes that seniors, regardless of health conditions, social or eco-

nomic status, have developed their own individual work of art, their lives.

By 2017, for the first time in our history, Ontario will be home to more people over 65 than under the age of 15. That is why our government is working hard to support seniors and help make Ontario the best place in Canada to grow older.

Through Ontario's Action Plan for Seniors, our government is ensuring that seniors and their families have access to quality services that support them in leading healthy and independent lives. Our plan is helping seniors stay healthy and get better access to health care, stay active and engaged in all aspects of community life, and live safely, independently and with dignity.

Since announcing the action plan in January, we have made progress on a number of fronts. In partnership with the Alzheimer Society of Ontario, we launched Finding Your Way, a new wandering prevention program that helps prevent people with dementia from going missing. We are the first province in Canada to make automatic sprinklers mandatory in care homes for seniors, people with disabilities and vulnerable Ontarians. Starting August 1, we are expanding access to publicly funded physiotherapy and exercise and fall prevention, classes benefiting 218,000 more people, mostly seniors.

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We have also introduced new measures to assist seniors making the transition to their homes from the hospital sooner, while also enhancing care for long-term-care residents with complex needs.

Through our new Health Link, we are working to match older Ontarians with a primary care provider to make it easier for them to navigate the health care system. And we are increasing the number of personal support workers for low-needs patients in the community.

Our 2013 budget reaffirmed our government's commitment to ensure seniors receive timely access to home and community care. Additional investments in the community care sector would help reduce wait times and give approximately 46,000 patients the help they need quickly and in the comfort of their own homes.

We are also giving caregivers a helping hand. The proposed Employment Standards Amendment Act would allow more families to take time off work to care for their loved ones, allowing more elderly Ontarians to recover from injury or illness at home.

We continue to take many more steps to improve the quality of life for seniors in our communities, including holding information sessions for seniors on active living at community fairs and other events, encouraging municipalities and other organizations to plan for age-friendly communities and enhancing tax credits available to seniors, such as the Healthy Homes Renovation Tax Credit that is helping more seniors live independently at home longer.

We are also launching a new guide to programs and services—this one here, Speaker; it's much more digested and contains a lot of information for our

seniors—that provides guidance on active living, caregiving, finances, health and wellness, housing, long-term-care homes, safety and security, and transportation. The guide is available in English and French and in 14 other languages as well.

I encourage people of all ages to join your local Seniors' Month celebrations happening in communities across the province this month. Let's celebrate and honour the knowledge and experience of seniors and the contributions they make every day in communities across our wonderful province.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): It's now time for responses.

JUNE CALLWOOD CHILDREN'S DAY

Mr. Ted Arnott: I'm pleased to rise this afternoon on behalf of Tim Hudak and the Ontario PC caucus to recognize the extraordinary community service of the late June Callwood. I want to thank the Premier for leading off this tribute and acknowledge her thoughtful and sincere sentiments. I also wish to welcome the guests who are here with us today.

If my arithmetic is correct, Ms. Callwood would have been 89 years old yesterday had she still been living. It's hard to believe that it has been six years that have passed since she left us. But what an enduring legacy she left behind. It is altogether fitting and appropriate that the provincial government chose to celebrate her life by declaring June 2, her birthday, as June Callwood Children's Day.

I'm sorry to say that I never met Ms. Callwood. I do recall, however, the last time I saw her in person. I think it was around the time I heard of her cancer diagnosis. It was at Bistro 990, and she was just across the room having lunch with a friend. I regret now that I didn't go over to her table just to say hello and thank you.

Reading last night about her passion, her caring, her perseverance and her ability to get things done, it struck me that most people would conclude that she earned her Order of Canada and her Order of Ontario over and over and over again, and 16 honorary university degrees—the most I've ever heard of anyone receiving.

Clearly her accomplishments were generously acknowledged in her lifetime, even though she never seemed to seek public recognition for herself, only for the causes she identified, embraced and then worked so hard to address.

She was fearless. She spoke her mind and voiced the truth as she saw it, without caring too much about the consequences. No wonder she was such an effective and provocative journalist, writer and broadcaster.

But it was her community activism that distinguished her most of all. Casey House, Nellie's hostel for women, Jessie's Centre for Teenagers, the Civil Liberties Association, The Issue Is Choice, Maggie's, the Polish Journalists Aid Committee, Connecting Seniors of Canada, the Canadian Campaign for Prison System Improvements, the city of Toronto's Children's Network, Women for

Political Action—the list goes on and on—all of these organizations bearing her indelible fingerprints and strengthened by her involvement and participation.

We in this House join her surviving family and her legions of friends and colleagues in remembering June Callwood. No matter what your political philosophy might be, on the occasion of this year's June Callwood Children's Day, we can all be inspired by one of Canada's greatest community activists.

SENIORS' MONTH

Mrs. Julia Munro: I'm pleased to mark Seniors' Month in Ontario on behalf of Tim Hudak and the Progressive Conservative caucus. Seniors' Month is the time when we recognize the millions of seniors in our province who built the society we live in and who continue to make a contribution every day.

Just yesterday, we celebrated D-Day at the Sutton Legion. Again, this is an opportunity for people to have that sense of the continuity of our society, of those who have gone before us and those who have made sacrifices—in many cases the ultimate sacrifice. Seniors are the people, then, who reflect who we are. And they make a difference in the lives of their families and communities.

Our government should be honouring their service but instead is cutting many of the important programs we have to help our seniors. I have received dozens of telephone calls, emails, letters and visits from senior citizens and their caregivers, asking why the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care is cutting funding for physiotherapy programs for seniors. They are also asking why the government will be delisting physio for seniors on August 1.

This means seniors living in retirement homes will have to get in line for care at CCACs instead of receiving treatment from a visiting physiotherapist, and it will be much more expensive. The Designated Physiotherapy Clinics Association estimates that CCACs have a cost per home treatment of approximately \$120, whereas the designated physiotherapy clinic members have a cost of \$12.20 per treatment billed to OHIP.

Overall, the association estimates that of the approximately \$200 million spent for OHIP-funded physio in the year ended March 31, some \$110 million was dedicated to long-term care. Under the government's new plan, it will be reduced to \$58.5 million. We think there should be better respect.

SENIORS' MONTH

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: I am pleased to rise to celebrate the month of June as Seniors' Month in Ontario. I am a firm believer that we are judged as a society by how we treat our seniors. Through their lifetime of contributions, they have earned our respect. Ontario's seniors have built the foundations for our way of

life, and we have a responsibility to show our gratitude, not just during Seniors' Month, but every month.

If we are judged by our treatment of our seniors, then I urge this government to take heed. Ontario's seniors have never faced greater challenges than they do today. Our record has never been worse, and many seniors are facing levels of indignity that are both heartbreaking and alarming.

In my riding of London, seniors have been told their access to a medically-necessary hydrotherapy pool is being taken away. In the news today, it was announced that, three years after Ontario's health ministry promised annual inspections, only 123 of the province's 600-plus nursing homes had been thoroughly inspected and reviewed. In fact, on the government's website listing of events for Seniors' Month, there isn't a single event listed for my riding of London—Fanshawe.

Recently, the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care announced her Seniors Strategy to much fanfare. She also announced the changes to physiotherapy funding, calling these changes an enhancement. The minister did not announce that her changes, in fact, represent a cut in funding for physiotherapy in long-term-care homes, where the most frail and elderly live, from \$110 million to \$58.5 million.

My own recent announcement asked this Legislature to prioritize home care services for seniors, to help them stay in their homes longer.

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I'd further ask for a commitment that would see the elimination of a 6,100-person backlog for home care services. I proposed a private member's motion that placed respect and dignity for seniors front and centre. I would urge the minister and the government to rethink their approach during Seniors' Month and restore the dignity and respect Ontario's seniors deserve and have spent a lifetime earning.

JUNE CALLWOOD CHILDREN'S DAY

JOURNÉE DES ENFANTS EN HOMMAGE À JUNE CALLWOOD

M^{me} France Gélinas: It is my pleasure to add my voice to June Callwood Children's Day, which was yesterday, June 2.

June Callwood was a journalist. She was an activist. She wrote 30 books, nearly 2,000 articles, and co-founded or founded over 50 organizations. She would become known as Canada's conscience, because she fought for social justice her whole life, even after she was afflicted with cancer, which eventually took her life in 2007.

In the 1950s, she defended day care when it was attacked by politicians—all male—as causing juvenile delinquency. Hard to believe, eh?

Then in the 1960s, she was arrested with street kids, to protest the way that they were treated by police. Things haven't changed that much, have they?

In 1970, she founded Nellie's Hostel for women, a place of refuge for women fleeing domestic violence.

In the 1980s, she founded Jessie's Centre for Teenagers, to help teen mothers develop the skills to care for their infants, and Casey House, the first hospice in Canada for people living with AIDS.

She was to become known as St. June, although she didn't like that name very much because she felt herself to be far from perfect. More so, she believed neither in God nor the afterlife. Instead, she said, she believed in kindness. She said: "I am missing a formal religion, but I am not without a theology, and my theology is that kindness is a divinity in motion."

In 1998 she became co-chair of Campaign Against Child Poverty, or CACP, a group of faith leaders and community service providers, and helped to raise awareness about child poverty, which she had become very well known for.

June was born on June 2, 1924. Elle est née la même date que ma mère. She was born in Chatham, and she grew up in poverty in a French-speaking community called Belle River, just outside of Windsor. J'en profite pour dire bonjour à tous les résidants de La Chaumiére, qui demeurent à Belle River.

Life wasn't easy for June. At 11 years old, during the Depression, she once went without food for three days. By the time she was 13, her father deserted her family. By age 16, she was at work as a cub reporter for the Brantford Expositor and then found a job at the Globe and Mail.

Une femme vraiment remarquable.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): At the risk of Speaker's prerogative—I got to know June Callwood, and there is a Brantford connection, as was just mentioned. She used to love to ride that little red car that she had and drove. I did deal with her with a couple of projects, so I do thank the members for their comments.

Another piece of prerogative: I have with me Alfred Hauk in the visitors' gallery, who is a doctor of naturopathic medicine, and they were here at noon hour today. Welcome, to my constituent. I'm glad you're here.

It is now time for petitions.

PETITIONS

PHYSIOTHERAPY SERVICES

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): To make sure that the member from Durham doesn't get a complex, I will go to the member from Durham for petitions.

Mr. John O'Toole: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I was wondering if you still cared.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Always.

Mr. John O'Toole: "Whereas the Ministry of Health is planning major changes to services provided by OHIP for physiotherapy as of August 1st, 2013; and

"Whereas this will drastically reduce the number of allowable treatments to 12 per year for people who are currently eligible for 100 treatments annually"—shameful—"and

"Whereas funding for physiotherapy services to seniors in long-term-care homes would be cut by almost 50%, from an estimated \$110 million per year to \$58.5 million per year; and

"Whereas ambulatory seniors in retirement homes—and long-term care—"would have to travel offsite for physiotherapy; and

"Whereas under the changes scheduled for August 1, the cost of visits under the CCAC (community care access centre) model will rise to \$120 per visit, rather than the current fee of \$12.20 per visit through OHIP physiotherapy providers; and

"Whereas these changes will deprive seniors and other eligible clients from the many health and mobility benefits of physiotherapy;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, ask that the delisting of OHIP physiotherapy clinics as of August 1st not proceed and that the provincial government guarantee there will be no reduction in services currently available for seniors, children and youths, people with disabilities and all those who are currently eligible for OHIP-funded physiotherapy."

I'm pleased to sign this and anticipate the breakfast with physiotherapy tomorrow morning.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): From here is a reminder that we do not make any editorials when reading petitions, and I'd appreciate if everyone would stay with that.

GOVERNMENT SERVICES

Mr. Michael Mantha: I present this petition on behalf of residents of Manitoulin Island: Evansville, Little Current, Spring Bay, Gore Bay and Kagawong. The petition is addressed:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas northern Ontario will suffer a huge loss of service as a result of government cuts to ServiceOntario counters;

"Whereas these cuts will have a negative impact on local businesses and local economies;

"Whereas northerners will now face challenges in accessing their birth certificates, health cards and licences;

"Whereas northern Ontario should not unfairly bear the brunt of decisions to slash operating budgets;

"Whereas, regardless of address, all Ontarians should be treated equally by their government;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"Review the decision to cut access to ServiceOntario for northerners, and provide northern Ontarians equal access to these services."

I agree with this petition and present it to page Jeffrey.

PHYSIOTHERAPY SERVICES

Mr. Jerry J. Ouellette: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas the Ministry of Health is planning to delist OHIP physiotherapy clinics as of August 1st, 2013, which represents cuts in physiotherapy services to seniors, children and people with disabilities who currently receive care at designated OHIP physiotherapy clinics; and

"Whereas people who are currently eligible for OHIP physiotherapy treatments can receive 100 treatments per year plus an additional 50 treatments annually if medically necessary. The proposed change will reduce the number of allowable treatments to 12 per year; while enhancing geographical access is positive, the actual physiotherapy that any individual receives will be greatly reduced; and

"Whereas the current OHIP physiotherapy providers have been providing seniors, children and people with disabilities with individualized treatments for over 48 years, and these services have been proven to help improve function, mobility, activities of daily living, pain, and falls risk;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To review and reverse the decision to drastically cut OHIP physiotherapy services to our most vulnerable population—seniors, children and people with disabilities; and to maintain the policy that seniors, children and people with disabilities continue to receive up to 100 treatments per year at eligible clinics, with a mechanism to access an additional 50 treatments when medically necessary."

I affix my signature in support.

CHILDREN'S AID SOCIETIES

Miss Monique Taylor: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas the Ontario government has approved a new funding formula to provide funding to the children's aid societies which are mandated by legislation to provide child protection services to Ontario's most vulnerable;

"Whereas, due to this new formula, the Children's Aid Society of Hamilton will be underfunded approximately \$4 million over the next three years, with no changes to mandated child protection responsibilities;

"Whereas chronic underfunding to the Children's Aid Society of Hamilton will result in dismantling of support services and a loss of staff, thereby jeopardizing the ability of the children's aid society to provide relevant services and protect Hamilton's children;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Ontario government look critically at the funding provided to the child welfare sector and restore funding to the Children's Aid Society of Hamilton."

I agree with this petition. I'll affix my name to it and give it to page Hooriya to bring to the Clerk.

FISH AND WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT

Mr. Bill Walker: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas beginning April 26, 2013, the new five-year commercial fishing agreement that the Saugeen Ojibway Nation and Ontario government have signed allowing commercial fishing to resume in Owen Sound and Colpoys Bay year-round over the term of the agreement; and

"Whereas the terms and conditions of the agreement were drafted and signed without full and proper consultations with all affected community groups, such as local sportsmen's clubs who have and continue to do a tremendous amount of work in regard to stocking bays with fish to support the sports fishery; and....

"Whereas the agreement provides no guarantees native fishermen won't set their gill nets deep inside nor within a one-kilometre radius of the mouths of Gleason Brook, as well as the Bothwell, Waterton and Kiefers Creeks to protect spawning salmon and rainbow trout; and

"Whereas the use of gill nets poses a safety risk to recreational angling and pleasure boating, and expansion of netting further into the bays threatens to destabilize fish stock and thus local sport fishing, tourism and the economy;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To repeal the agreement created between the Saugeen Ojibway Nation and Ontario government, effective immediately...."

Speaker, there are 1,657 signatures. I support this petition and will sign it and send it with page Eric.

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PHYSIOTHERAPY SERVICES

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Ministry of Health is planning on eliminating OHIP-funded physiotherapy services currently provided to seniors in retirement homes—and changing the current provider of the service as of August 1st, 2013; and

"Whereas the Minister of Health has announced a total of \$33 million in physiotherapy funding, or \$550 per senior for 60,000 seniors, including those in retirement homes; and

"Whereas instead of the 100 to 150 visits per year a senior may receive now from their dedicated on-site OHIP physiotherapy staff, the change would mean a CCAC therapist would provide 5 to 10 visits on-site only to seniors who are bedridden or have an acute injury. All other ambulatory seniors would have to attend other community locations/clinics for physiotherapy and exercise off-site; and

"Whereas this change not only reduces the amount of money available, but also moves funds from the lowest-cost provider (OHIP physiotherapy providers—\$12.20 per treatment) to the highest-cost provider (CCAC—\$120 per treatment); and

"Whereas current OHIP physiotherapy providers, who have been providing seniors with individualized treat-

ments for over 48 years, will be delisted from OHIP by the government; and

“Whereas these services have been proven to help seniors improve in their activities of daily living, mobility, pain and fall risks;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“To review and reverse the decision to eliminate OHIP physiotherapy services to seniors in retirement homes, our most vulnerable population and most at risk for falls; and continue with the provision of at least 100 treatments per year with a mechanism to access an additional 50 treatments, if medically necessary, with the current low-cost OHIP physiotherapy providers.”

I sign this petition and give it to page Simon to deliver.

LONG-TERM CARE

Mr. Victor Fedeli: I have 902 signatures collected by Shirley Robinson, chair of the NorthEast Family Council Network, region 13.

“Whereas Ontario ranks ninth of 10 provinces in terms of the total per capita funding allocated to long-term care; and

“Whereas the Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care data shows that there are more than 30,000 Ontarians waiting for long-term-care placements and wait-times have tripled since 2005; and

“Whereas there is a perpetual shortage of staff in long-term-care facilities and residents often wait an unreasonable length of time to receive care, e.g., to be attended to for toileting needs; to be fed; to receive a bath; for pain medication. Since 2008, funding for 2.8 ... hours of care per resident per day has been provided. In that budget year, a promise was made to increase this funding to 4.0 hours per resident per day by 2012. This has not been done; and

“Whereas the training of personal support workers is unregulated and insufficient to provide them with the skills and knowledge to assist residents who are being admitted with higher physical, psychological and emotional needs. Currently, training across the province is varied, inconsistent and” unregulated;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to:

“(1) immediately increase the number of paid hours of nursing and personal care per resident per day to 4.0 hours (as promised in 2008);

“(2) develop a plan to phase in future increases so that the number of paid hours per resident per day of nursing and personal care is 5.0 hours by January 2015;

“(3) establish a licensing body, such as a college, that will develop a process of registration, accreditation and certification for all personal support workers.”

I sign this petition and give it to page Melanie.

PHYSIOTHERAPY SERVICES

Mr. Taras Natyshak: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario that reads:

“Whereas the Ministry of Health is planning on cutting physiotherapy services to seniors in long-term-care homes—from an estimated \$110 million to \$58.5 million; and

“Whereas with this change seniors will not receive the care they are currently entitled to through their current OHIP physiotherapy providers, who the government plans to delist from OHIP on August 1st, 2013; and

“Whereas the government has announced that the funding level, the number of treatments a resident could receive, has not been specified and will be reduced from a maximum of 150 visits/year to some unknown level, which means the hours of care and number of staff providing seniors with physiotherapy will also be significantly reduced as of August 1st, 2013; and

“Whereas our current OHIP physiotherapy providers have been providing seniors with individualized treatments for over 48 years, and these services have been proven to help seniors improve in their activities of daily living, mobility, pain and falls risk;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“To review and reverse this drastic cut of OHIP physiotherapy services to seniors, our most vulnerable population, and to continue with \$110-million physiotherapy funding for seniors in long-term-care homes.”

I agree with this petition, will affix my name and send it off with Lamiha.

LONG-TERM CARE

Mr. Jim McDonell: “Petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas Ontario ranks ninth of 10 provinces in terms of the total per capita funding allocated to long-term care; and

“Whereas the Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care data shows that there are more than 30,000 Ontarians waiting for long-term-care placements and wait-times have tripled since” 2003; “and

“Whereas there is a perpetual shortage of staff in long-term-care facilities and residents often wait an unreasonable length of time to receive care, e.g., to be attended to for toileting needs; to be fed; to receive a bath; for pain medication. Since 2008, funding for 2.8 paid hours of care per resident per day has been provided. In that budget year, a promise was made to increase this funding to 4.0 hours per resident per day by 2012. This has not been done; and

“Whereas the training of personal support workers is unregulated and insufficient to provide them with the skills and knowledge to assist residents who are being admitted with higher physical, psychological and emotional needs. Currently, training across the province is varied, inconsistent and under-regulated;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to:

“(1) immediately increase the number of paid hours of nursing and personal care per resident per day to 4.0 hours (as promised in 2008);

"(2) develop a plan to phase in future increases so that the number of paid hours per resident per day of nursing and personal care is 5.0 hours" per day "by January 2015;

"(3) establish a licensing body, such as a college, that will develop a process of registration, accreditation and certification for all personal support workers."

I agree with the petition and will be passing it on to page Jimmy.

LONG-TERM CARE

Mr. Michael Mantha: When you hear one good petition, you read your own. After a grand tour of the island, along with our critic for health care, Mrs. France Gélinas, the member for Nickel Belt, we as well were presented with this petition from members from various long-term-care facilities:

"Whereas Ontario ranks ninth of 10 provinces in terms of the total per capita funding allocated to long-term care; and

"Whereas the Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care data shows that there are more than 30,000 people in Ontario waiting for long-term-care placements and wait-times have tripled since 2005; and

"Whereas there is a perpetual shortage of staff in long-term-care facilities and residents often wait an unreasonable length of time to receive care—e.g., to be attended to for toileting needs; to be fed; to receive a bath; for pain medication. Since 2008, funding for 2.8 paid hours of care per resident per day has been provided. In that budget year, a promise was made to increase this funding to 4.0 hours per resident per day by 2012. This has not been done; and

"Whereas the personal support worker program has no provincial governing body that would provide provincial standards and regulation to assure the best care for residents who are being admitted with higher physical, psychological and emotional needs. Currently, training across the province is varied, inconsistent and insufficient;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to:

"(1) immediately increase the number of paid hours of nursing and personal care per resident per day to 4.0 hours (as promised in 2008);

"(2) develop a plan to phase in future increases so that the number of paid hours per resident per day of nursing and personal care is 5.0 hours" per day "by January 2015;

"(3) establish a licensing body, such as a college, that will provide registration, accreditation and certification for all personal support workers in the province."

I fully support this petition and present it to my friend Carlo to bring it down to the table.

1420

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Unfortunately, that concludes the time that we have available for petitions, and I apologize to the members I couldn't recognize.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

ORDER OF BUSINESS

Resuming the debate adjourned on May 30, 2013, on the amendment to the amendment to the motion to apply a timetable to certain business of the House.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): When we were last debating this government order, the member for York-Simcoe had the floor. I return to the member for York-Simcoe and recognize her.

Mrs. Julia Munro: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to be able to conclude my comments today regarding the programming motion. There are two issues that I will take the last few minutes to concentrate on in my remarks.

The first one is that when you look at the details of the programming motion, which outlines two hours of debate, today we have two hours of debate, or at least are doing a rotation, but there are no comments and questions because of the nature of this programming debate. When we're looking at doing this, this motion also captures the time which can be spent in hearings and the time for clause-by-clause, and at the end of that process, anything that hasn't been taken care of within the context of the motion is deemed to have been done.

I think it's important to contrast that process, which is very much a lockstep, "Now you do it. This is it. End of story," with a piece of legislation such as the one we debated on the Healthy Homes Renovation Tax Credit. This was a bill that would have a benefit to a relatively small group of people, and we had the occasion to be able to spend hours and hours and hours debating it. It was, I think, about a page and a half long. It just gives you a sense of the priorities. When we have something that requires and should allow every single member to have a comment on it, debate is limited.

The second part that I want to deal with that I find rather troubling is the fact that the government has joined with the NDP in the budget, and part of that deal was the creation of a financial officer. The creation of a new officer of the Parliament should be something that, again, provides the opportunity for lengthy discussion, for debate in the House, for deliberation, for opportunities to look at other officers and other Legislatures and so forth. This is built into the programming motion so that none of that normal process is being recognized and being allowed for.

Mr. Peter Shurman: Speedy passage.

Mrs. Julia Munro: Yes. It's called speedy passage, my friend says, and speedy passage is exactly what it means. It means that any kind of due diligence, any kind of debate, any kind of opportunity for input is swept away under the rug of timeliness. We know, as parliamentarians, that it is through debate that public interest is voiced. That's the democratic process. So right from the very beginning this motion diminishes and prevents debate.

I want to speak to the question of the financial accountability, because here we are talking about the

creation of an officer of the assembly. We already have five officers, if I remember correctly, and this would be the creation of the sixth. One of the things about the creation of an officer is that obviously it's at arm's length, as the government will quickly tell us. It is that independent voice that they say is part of this process. You have people like the Integrity Commissioner, the Auditor General, the Ombudsman, the Environmental Commissioner, the privacy commissioner, and yes, for sure they do have that independent voice. But when you look at the details of that voice, they are primarily in the area of data collection. They can do research. They can procure reviews. They can do all of those kinds of things, but they cannot make a decision which is a cover for ministerial responsibility. Ministerial responsibility is what this form of government depends on. It doesn't matter how many of those voices of the assembly are created; they are not a substitute for ministerial responsibility.

The Liberals and the NDP have agreed on the creation of this new independent commissioner. Obviously I don't have a problem with the notion of having someone look at the books, but when you take a look at the scandals that have beleaguered this government, when you're talking about eHealth and Ornge and the decision around the gas plants, all of those are at the doorstep of a particular minister. You can have as many people as you want being the "I see, I see" all the way down the bureaucratic line; if they are all turned in the same direction, guess what? They come out with the same answer.

When we look at those scandals and our work at trying to shed light on decision-making, it becomes very clear that there's an entire industry being created to be able to make it murky and difficult and, frankly, avoid the real issue, which is ministerial accountability. So this motion is really about political power. The Liberals want to stay in power and have bent over backwards to accommodate the NDP, so long as they will prop up the government as long as possible.

As I've said, Ontario does not need another independent commissioner to do the work of an election, but what it does need is people to assume their ministerial responsibility and accountability. I made reference at some length to that in my previous opportunity to speak on this bill, because of the fact that it is the cornerstone of responsible government and it's what people are looking for, that kind of leadership. What we're really saying here is that until we have, I would say, some better-demonstrated ministerial accountability in this government, the creation of a Financial Accountability Office will do nothing to solve the current problems. We already have systems in place to ensure that the government spends tax dollars wisely. What we don't have is people who stand up to be accountable. We have seen these systems ignored, and the Liberal government has demonstrated that they are not up to this challenge of ministerial accountability and therefore are unfit to govern Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Pursuant to standing order 47(c), I am now required to interrupt the

proceedings and announce that there have been more than six and one half hours of debate on the motion. This debate will therefore be deemed adjourned unless the government House leader, or his designate, specifies otherwise.

I'm pleased to recognize the Minister of Community Safety and francophone affairs.

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: Mr. Speaker, we would like debate to continue.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate.

Mrs. Christine Elliott: It is a pleasure to rise this afternoon to speak to this programming motion, which of course has been brought forward to facilitate the passage of the budget bill and to establish the Financial Accountability Office. This is, of course, going to happen, as we know now, because of the many concessions that were made by the Wynne Liberals to the third party in order to get the budget passed, quite to the disappointment of many people across Ontario. It certainly is a matter of concern economically.

1430

I think, to set the context for this discussion, I'd like to raise a few points, just to let people who may be watching know where we stand as a province right now. Right now we have a debt standing at \$273 billion—unprecedented in Ontario's history. The amount that we have as our debt now requires the third-largest payment; after health and education is interest payments on borrowed money. It's going to go up to about \$11 billion this year. Imagine what we could do with \$11 billion: hospitals, health care, building transit—we could do a lot with that.

The deficit is now at \$9.8 billion. We've heard a lot from the Liberals talking about how great that is, that it's under \$10 billion. It's shocking that we're there in the first place but, of course, that's only for this year, too. It's going to go up to \$11.7 billion, so the deficit is not being reduced this year; it's actually going up, and I think that's an important factor for people to know about.

We have an unemployment rate right now in Ontario of 7.7%, which has been higher than the national average for over five years in a row. It shows no sign of going down and, of course, for youth, the unemployment rate is almost double that; it hovers at around 15%, which means that many recent college and university graduates are having a really, really tough time finding work out there. It's putting a whole generation at risk, because the longer they're without work, the more difficult it is, and they're starting to lose hope.

In short, Ontario is in a financial mess, and that's bad enough both internally and externally, because what's happening now is that the international bond-rating agencies are really looking over our shoulder. They're looking at Ontario with concern, and that's important for us to realize, because every time they downgrade Ontario as a credit risk, that means that interest rates will go up, and every percentage point that interest rates go up means about \$500 million more that we have to pay out in interest.

So it's critical that we get this under control. We are facing serious issues here in Ontario, yet this budget does nothing to substantively address them. It doesn't address the spending problem that the McGuinty—now Wynne—government has, nor the unprecedented levels of waste and mismanagement that have seen billions of taxpayers' dollars wasted, largely for partisan purposes. Until these issues are dealt with, Ontario is going to continue to languish economically.

I'd just like to speak about a couple of the issues that we've been faced with in the last few years, speaking about waste and mismanagement. Let's start with eHealth. The eHealth program has now spent over \$2 billion, and although some Liberal insiders received some nice payouts as a result of this, we have yet to see a fully operational electronic records system here in the province of Ontario, which we badly need in many respects. We need it in order to cut down on unnecessary duplication of tests, saving money, but it also means saving lives. We have a very high number of toxic drug interactions each year that cost patients' lives. If we had a functioning electronic health records system, we could cut down on those dramatically. We saw the Ornge scandal waste hundreds of millions of dollars—again, taxpayers' money—and also putting patients' safety at risk in the process. And of course the most recent Liberal scandal: the decision to cancel two gas plants, at a cost of \$600 million to Ontario taxpayers, purely for partisan purposes—it's shocking. The Auditor General's report on the cancellation of the Mississauga power plant made it clear that this government spends tax dollars without any respect for the hard-working people who earn them, and the auditor, in his report, pointed out some very specific examples of that: \$4.2 million was spent to purchase land and a warehouse that Ontarians never actually got back, \$41 million was spent on undocumented labour costs, and the list goes on and on.

Case after case demonstrates that the Liberals have always put partisan purposes first before the interests of the people of Ontario. Unlike the NDP, we believe that when the government has wasted all this money, it's time to hold this government to account. That's why we're taking the position we have taken with respect to this budget.

While the people of Ontario feel the brunt of these decisions every day, the province didn't have to wait long to see what the credit rating agencies had to say about this government. On May 30, Standard and Poor's announced that it was cutting Ontario's outlook from stable to negative, with a possible downgrade coming. Of course, this is just over one month after the introduction of the budget. I think it speaks to what I talked about earlier: If we do get downgraded, interest rates go up and costs for interest payments skyrocket even higher.

But I think what is most troubling about all of this is the government's desire to introduce a suite of new taxes for Ontarians in order to fund transit initiatives. The government—despite protestations, but wait for it—are now likely to push for a 1% hike to the HST and a 5-

cent-per-litre gas tax, among many other so-called revenue tools.

I find it unbelievable that a government that spends over \$130 billion in the budget can't find less than 2% of revenues to dedicate to a so-called priority. If transit is a priority, then why isn't the 2% considered in their budget?

Ontarians have paid enough. Hard-working taxpayers have given enough. I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, that in my riding this weekend, I heard from constituent after constituent saying, "Don't let them raise the HST. We've had it. We're fed up to here with taxes. Don't let them do it."

The people of Ontario have held up their part of the bargain, and now it's up to this government to hold up theirs. If transit is a priority, then you make it a priority in the current budget envelope. You eliminate waste and the nice-to-have programs. Focus on the priorities, the things we actually need to have. And no question: We need to have transit to get Ontario moving. These are the tough decisions that this Liberal government refuses to make.

You know, I find it really interesting that after cutting the GST by 2%, the federal government is making the largest and longest infrastructure investment in Canadian history, totalling \$70 billion over 10 years, and yet this provincial government can't find \$2 billion in their current budget without raising taxes. It's about setting priorities.

Interjections.

Mrs. Christine Elliott: I repeat to the members opposite who are heckling me: It's about setting priorities. And that's what we, as the PC Party, have been talking about in this Legislature. We've been talking about ideas, priorities, things we need to invest in in order to get Ontario moving again.

We have put out a series of 12 white papers setting out possible policies and priorities that we think would get Ontario moving again. We believe it's fair to implement an across-the-board wage freeze for public sector workers. This would save \$2 billion annually just alone. We've also talked about other issues—about health care priorities, my issue of responsibility as a critic—things we need to be spending money on and not wasting taxpayers' dollars.

We talk, in one of our health care white papers, about mental health reform. Granted, we've taken some steps, and that's great. But there's still a lot more work to be done. We need to cut the number of hospitalizations that people with mental health problems have.

I had the opportunity over the course of the weekend to go on a ride-along with the emergency medical services in downtown Toronto. I heard from the front-line care workers: the EMS workers, whom I thank very much for giving me the opportunity to accompany them, firefighters and also police officers as we went out on calls, many of which were related to mental health and addictions issues. I heard from them about the need for mental health reform, because the reality is that people

are not getting the help they need. They're going through—it's like a revolving door through emergency departments. We need to do better for them.

We need to make home care investments. We've heard this government talk about it: talking, first of all, about a five-day home care guarantee; now it's a five-day home care target. The time that people wait for home care in this province is ridiculous. Many people are back in hospital before they even get connected with home care.

We need to focus more on health prevention and health promotion so that we don't have a whole generation of young people growing up with chronic disease. Of course, chronic disease management is one of the important issues of our time. We have an epidemic of diabetes in society—not just adults; with children, too. So we need to talk about all of these things in order to make Ontarians healthy and to get them healthy and productive in our economy.

1440

So far I've spent time speaking about the spending problems and the mismanagement in this government. That's of course only half the equation. The other problem with this budget is the fact that it really doesn't address economic growth and job creation. Again we don't see any real plan here. Other than having a \$45-million subsidy for music producers, there really isn't anything in this budget that speaks to kick-starting the economy and creating new jobs in any very substantive way.

We keep hearing from this government about how they're doing their best; there's been this huge world economic downturn. But the reality is, what we're facing in Ontario is very different than what is happening in other provinces. Many of the western provinces are doing extremely well, and it's not just the ones that have resources. Certainly Alberta and Saskatchewan are doing well. They're booming, in fact. But even Manitoba, which doesn't have a huge resource base, is doing a lot better than Ontario in terms of unemployment rates and other indices.

We are not doing well on many fronts, and there are lots of things that we need to be addressing in order to move forward. One is we don't have businesses coming to Ontario. We can see that we're losing businesses and we've got some that are bypassing Ontario for some of those other provinces, as I've said. The reasons are many and varied.

One is—and this relates particularly to manufacturing—that we do not have a coherent energy policy in this province. We have a real disconnect between what's going on in the traditional energy sources like nuclear production, hydroelectric power and other power sources, and the green energy renewables—solar, wind, biogas and other types of energy production. We're paying enormous subsidies. There's some speculation that that's going to be stopping, but we'll wait and see what happens with that. But we need to make sure that we have an energy policy that makes sense and is going to be

affordable for both residential and commercial consumers for the foreseeable future. We know that hydro bills are going to skyrocket because of the disastrous decisions this government has made, but that's also a big deterrent for other manufacturing businesses to not even take a look at Ontario in the first place.

We have mountains of bureaucracy and red tape that is really stifling the ability of small businesses that are here already. It's keeping them from growing and prospering and expanding their operations, but it's also preventing other businesses from even looking at Ontario in the first place.

We have a huge mismatch between the job openings and the job skills that Ontarians have. We've heard a lot about People Without Jobs, Jobs Without People. It's a serious issue. We're bringing in people from other countries, which is great. We want to encourage immigration into this country, but we also have a whole generation of young people that are graduating and not able to find jobs. All of this points to the need for us to work more closely with business to make sure that we can speak to them, have them speak to each other about the jobs that we need and the jobs that people are graduating with, and create those new programs in our community colleges and in our universities in order to foster that kind of growth.

We also have a situation where we don't really have a culture of entrepreneurship here in Ontario. If you visit other jurisdictions—I've had the opportunity to visit Israel, where they are doing amazing work at commercializing products and creating that culture of entrepreneurship where people come up with those new ideas when people graduate from universities. They want to graduate with both a diploma or a degree and a job that they can—both for themselves, because they're starting their own business, and that they can employ other people. Ontario universities are now starting that process. We have some great examples with the DMZ, the Digital Media Zone, at Ryerson University, as well as the unit at the University of Toronto, which is investing in the commercialization of health sciences projects. This needs to grow and expand across the province so that young people are given that sense of entrepreneurship, that they feel that they can take the risk to start their own businesses and that they're going to have a chance to compete.

The other issue that we really need to think about in Ontario is apprenticeship reform. We certainly have talked about that extensively, the point that we need to adjust the ratios to a 1-to-1 ratio for most positions, because we need to give those young people the opportunity to get into the skilled trades, to be able to have the opportunity to be apprentices. Right now, the ratios that we have discourage that and prevent many young people from getting into a good job that we actually need here in the province of Ontario. That's one thing that we continue to urge this government to deal with.

But there are other things that we need to deal with in terms of apprenticeship reform as well. Again, that

involves, I believe, a large public education program to speak to young people and also to their parents about the merits of going into a skilled trade, as opposed to perhaps getting a university degree, because it's not for everybody. If you get into a skilled trade, you can make a very good living for yourself and your family and also help grow the Ontario economy as well.

I think that right now, what we have is a lot of young people who don't really know about how to become an apprentice, and they really only get into it if maybe they have a family member or a friend that's already involved in a skilled trade. I think we really need to advance that with high school guidance counsellors and, again, with parents and young people themselves. I think there's a lot of work that we have to do, but none of it is addressed in this budget.

The final thing that I'd just like to touch on, as did my colleague the member for York-Simcoe, is talking about the Financial Accountability Office that this budget will set up. As she mentioned, there are already five levels of Financial Accountability Officers here in Ontario, and I'll name them again. We've got the Auditor General; we have the Ombudsman; we have the Integrity Commissioner, the Environmental Commissioner, and the Information and Privacy Commissioner—five offices that are already mandated to oversee virtually everything that happens in this place.

But what we don't have, and what we need to have, is cabinet responsibility. We need this cabinet to step up to the plate and make sure that they do their jobs, make sure that they don't let things like Ornge happen right under their noses, make sure that they don't have eHealth happen. I keep mentioning health issues because they have been scandals and they are my critic's area of responsibility, but there are many others.

We need to make sure that the infrastructure minister finds the tools that he needs in order to be able to make those investments in our infrastructure, in our economy, without continuing to tax Ontarians. At the end of the day, there's only one taxpayer. You can call them revenue tools if you want to, but a tax is a tax is a tax. Again, we've heard enough from people that they don't want to be taxed any more.

We've had opportunities to talk to this government about what we think their priorities should be. They haven't been listening, but I can assure the people of Ontario that we are going to continue to talk about them. We would urge the people of Ontario to take a look at what we've put forward. Again, we've issued 12 white papers on various topics. We've got more to do. There are other issues that we want to be speaking about and that we think that Ontarians are going to be interested in. We've got ideas on everything from growing jobs in the economy to agriculture to health care and everything else in between.

I really appreciate the opportunity to have been able to speak to these issues today. I would urge the people of Ontario to tune in. We're going to continue to hold this government accountable for the waste and mismanagement

and their failure to deliver on growing Ontario's economy.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: I'll also be speaking to this bill—this motion. My goodness, it's an important motion. I can't understand why the Liberals wouldn't want to be part and parcel of this.

Ontario is on a very difficult path, and our 10-year outlook in Ontario is downright scary. You know, our current fiscal situation—and I would like to point out today some of the fiscal problems that Ontario is faced with.

1450

Sure, being in debt is not a good thing, but what are the ultimate consequences of it? I'd like to look down the road as to where those consequences are going to bring us as a province, and some of the factors from outside the province that are going to affect us.

That being the case, the future of Ontario stands—we're standing on a fiscal cliff. Let me begin with my prophecies, and the prophecy has to start from the current situation. Currently we're looking at a debt, a debt that is currently \$253 billion; that's this year that has just ended. It's projected to be \$273 billion.

These are huge numbers. People's eyes just kind of glaze over when you talk about \$1 billion or \$2 billion or even \$10 million. People just don't equate those huge numbers with anything in their lives.

Suffice it to say that when the Liberals were elected in 2003, up until that time—throughout Confederation, from 1867—Ontario had managed to accumulate \$138 billion in debt. This year, that debt will more than double. Over 10 years of this government's tenure in this province, the debt of Ontario has doubled. That alone is a very serious trend that we were on, and this government is doing precious little to fix that.

They have a plan to balance that budget. That plan looks at revenue growth; it doesn't look at expense declines. It looks at revenue growth, and the revenue climbs in 2017-18 to \$134 billion from the current level of \$127.6 billion.

The program spending is interesting, because the program spending in their projections to balance the budget—from 2014-18, the program spending is flat, at \$118.3 billion. For the fiscal year 2014-15, it's \$118 billion. In 2015-16, it's \$118 billion. In 2016-17, it's \$118 billion. No one in Ontario could possibly hold the program expenses of this province to zero. Some 55% of the money raised in taxes in this province goes to pay salaries. We can't hold salaries flat for four straight years, and that's what their plan calls for. It's a ridiculous plan. It can't come to pass. They're not serious about it.

They've made no real effort to balance the budget. They're continuing to spend money, and that debt that they're putting us into will continue to loom in front of us. The deficit is currently at \$11.7 billion, and it's going to float around that level for the foreseeable future.

The interest on the debt is currently standing at \$11 billion—\$11 billion. You could build 11 hospitals a year,

with 275 beds in them, each year for \$11 billion. It's a huge amount of money, and that is only the interest on the debt. If interest levels in this country or across the world ever increase, that number will escalate very, very rapidly. In fact, the interest on the debt is now the third-largest expenditure in the provincial budget, after health and education. Ontario could do so much more if that interest on the debt wasn't such a significant number.

The other thing that concerns me, and should concern everyone, is the growth of the budget. Remember that all of the expenditures that the government makes come from individuals through taxes—taxes of one sort or another—whether it be a gasoline tax, whether it be an income tax, whether it be a business tax. Ultimately, individuals always pay for that budget.

Budget revenue only comes from one source, and that's from the people of Ontario. In 2003, the budget was \$68 billion. Today, it stands at \$127.6 billion—almost double what it was 10 years ago. Nothing else in our society has almost doubled in price; only the Ontario budget has doubled in price. That gives me huge concern, because there are factors across Ontario which we don't control, one of them being our exchange rate. When we moved from 72 cents US to close to parity, it had a tremendous impact on our ability to export Ontario goods. If our exchange rate were to move into positive territory, to \$1.10, \$1.20—people say, "Oh, no, it would never move up that high." Well, let me give you a scenario.

Right now, Alberta is pumping about four million barrels of oil a day. That puts them on a par with the minor states in the Persian Gulf; Qatar and the United Arab Emirates are pumping in that range. Saudi Arabia pumps somewhere between eight million and 12 million barrels a day; they're the world's largest producer. But Canada and Alberta are beginning to play in that field. Alberta is continuing to expand its ability to produce in the oil sands, and they have 100 years' supply. They have one of the world's largest supplies of oil. As this continues and Alberta continues to grow the amount of oil that we're pumping on a daily basis—standing at four million barrels a day today; they have plans to expand that to at least seven million in the next 10 years, and perhaps they'll get more than seven million barrels a day—it will make them one of the major oil producers in the world, and the exchange rate of the Canadian dollar will follow that oil production.

If our exchange rate grows to that \$1.10, \$1.15, Ontario—which is the producer in Canada; we're the manufacturer in Canada—will have to have its fiscal house in order, in order to have what's left of our manufacturing and the jobs that we currently enjoy in this province. If we don't start today to get our fiscal house in order, 10 years from now it will be too late. Ten years from now, we'll be facing an exchange rate of \$1.15, \$1.20, and Ontario will be in a devastating situation. That's a reality. That's a reality that anyone in the business of looking at the economy can see. Companies will be preparing themselves for that eventuality in

Ontario, and Ontario will not do well out of that situation because we are not putting our fiscal house in order. That will create some very, very difficult times for Ontario and its citizens in the future.

1500

Ontario could suffer from a lack of manufacturing. We could watch our car industry be moved out of this province. We're already seeing General Motors moving the Camaro line out of Oshawa, moving it into Detroit. At one point in time, Oshawa—the three plants down there were the largest automobile assembly facility in the world. It is no longer. It used to produce the best cars in the world, and still does. Its record of producing high-quality cars is phenomenal—it has never been touched by other jurisdictions around the world—but that is not enough for that complex to survive. We have to be competitive. Our exchange rate is becoming more and more difficult to equate to that competitiveness, especially with the government ignoring the fiscal realities that we're facing today and in the very near term, the 10-year future. There's nothing about that in this year's budget. There's nothing about looking at the realities of the situation that Ontario faces in that medium-term future.

All is not lost. Ontario is a great province. It has great people. It has well-educated people. One of the highest levels of education in North America exists right here in Ontario, and that will serve us well for the future.

There are also economic opportunities for Ontario, not the least of which is the Ring of Fire. The Ring of Fire, of course, is a large deposit of natural resources that has been located in northern Ontario. It's remote. There are no railways to it. There are no roads to it. It sits on aboriginal lands. I understand that there are nine aboriginal tribes that have to be negotiated with, and this government hasn't even begun that process. It hasn't begun the process of putting railways or roads—two different access points, I would hope—into this remote location.

When the Ring of Fire, which has the world's largest reserve supply of chromium ore—chromium is an essential part of making stainless steel, something that is not going away in the immediate future. The current supplies of chromium come from South Africa and Russia, and this deposit is the world's largest known reserve of that material. It also has copper, gold, silver and nickel. I understand that the nickel deposits in that area could keep Vale, or Inco, in Sudbury going for 50 years. It's a hugely wealthy deposit, and yet not one word about this deposit and its potential for Ontario was mentioned in the fiscal plan going forward in Ontario, wasn't mentioned in this year's budget—and that's a shame.

I understand that when this deposit is fully developed it could add up to 20% to Ontario's GDP. It could be the source of almost one million jobs—900,000 jobs could be added to Ontario's workforce from the development of this Ring of Fire. Those are direct jobs and downstream jobs. And yet not one word was mentioned in the budget. Not one minister in the government was made responsible for this tremendous opportunity—almost a

million jobs, almost 20% added to the gross domestic product of this province. The revenues from this find could pay off the provincial debt. It could mean to Ontario what the oil sands mean to the province of Alberta—and not one word in our budget.

Seven of the nine tribes have had discussions; two of them have not yet been contacted.

This government isn't serious about the kinds of economic opportunities that are going to make Ontario the place where people rely on public services. We rely on good health care. We rely on a strong social safety net. We rely on good education. Those things all cost money, and they can't be sustained if Ontario's economy doesn't continue to grow. This government is ignoring those opportunities that would create the environment in which that growth could continue, to ensure that our seniors have a safe, good place to live, and to ensure that those who are less fortunate than those sitting in this Legislature, or the vast majority of Ontarians—that we will have the resources to give those people who need our help to make sure that the poorest and weakest among us live at as high a standard of living as they can find anywhere in the world.

We can't continue down the path we're going, with higher debt, higher deficits and deficit financing, and expect to supply those kinds of opportunities to our future generations. Debt in government is equally bad as it is in our individual lives. It restricts us, it confines us and it makes our lives difficult.

I would like to see this government take a much more active role in developing the Ring of Fire—in developing the opportunities Ontario will have—and begin planning for an Ontario where our exchange rate for our dollar is much higher than it is today. Without that planning, Ontario will be headed in a very dangerous direction. We will be headed to a fiscal cliff, and that's not where any of us want Ontario to go. But it's sitting there in front of us. The reality of Alberta pumping seven million barrels of oil a day in the next 10 years—I don't think many people would argue with that. I think that will be a reality, and they—

Interjection.

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: The Minister of Correctional Services says there's no way they can ship it anywhere. Well, you're talking about the XL pipeline. Believe me: That oil is already going to Tulsa. It's already going there. It's going by rail car. Yes, it would be nice to have a pipeline down there. But believe me: People in business will find a way to deliver something to a customer who wants to buy it. It's already travelling by rail car.

The oil going to the Far East—the pipeline through Alberta—that too. When the infrastructure is in place in Vancouver and in the ports along the west coast, that oil also will travel to the Far East, and it will travel from Alberta to the coast by rail car. It's not rocket science; it's how the oil industry was built. That's just the reality.

In Ontario, we're heading down this road without planning, with deficit financing and with no plan for our future—our five-year future, our 10-year future. Govern-

ments that think from election to election drive their provinces into a place where no one wants to be. That's what is happening to Ontario, and I don't see anything in this budget that's going to fix that.

Unfortunately, Ontario is hurtling toward the fiscal cliff, and there is nothing that the government is doing to stop the impending problem we're going to have. It's a great province. It's a great, great province, and we could remain that way far into the future, but not in the direction we're currently headed.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: I know this is a programming motion, a substantive motion to facilitate the speedy passage of the budget. But if I may, I'd like to actually speak about the budget, the hopes and aspirations of the people that I represent.

1510

I enjoy this every year. Despite the fact that I have not yet supported a Liberal budget, and I probably won't in my foreseeable future or in the long term, I do like to take the opportunity to talk about the people whom I represent and what they do for a living, what their values are, why they sent me to this place and the feedback that I get from them. I think that each year MPPs would be missing a wonderful opportunity if they didn't look at the budget as an opportunity to come to the floor and speak with pride about the people who sent us here.

I would also first like to say congratulations to my good friend Charles Sousa. Although he and I don't agree on very much, particularly with respect to this budget, I was here when he delivered his first budget, and I saw the pride in his family's eyes when he was sitting there to deliver his first budget. For that, I congratulate him. I cannot support his budget, but I do understand how important family is, and that day I wanted to make that remark about how important that must have been for his family.

I was sent here six years ago—seven years ago, Speaker; I'm getting older. I was sent here in a byelection after I replaced John Baird. My friend Christine Elliott also came here that same day, replacing her husband, the now federal finance minister, Jim Flaherty. Peter Tabuns joined us on that day as well. I believe he replaced Marilyn Churley.

When I came here, it was two years into a mandate by the current government. At the time, they were led by Dalton McGuinty. I decided I would run for a couple of reasons. One is that they had decided to bring in the health tax—I thought a greedy tax grab. At the time, I felt that, Speaker, because although they said it was a health tax, it was never going to go into any other revenue pot other than the general revenues. That meant that they could not accept that money from the taxpayers of this province, from the parents and the patients and the seniors and all of those people who rely on our health care system; they couldn't accept that money and then at the same time say there would be any accountability for it to go toward the health budget.

At the time, I remember it coming in, and I didn't have a family physician when I first was expecting my own daughter. That is what actually drove me to decide to run for politics. Full disclosure: I've always been involved in politics, but it takes a special person—and I think there are 107 special people in this assembly—to put their name on a ballot and actually deal with the slings and arrows that we get from time to time. But I did decide to put my neck out there in order to talk about the issues.

What I learned when I first decided to seek the nomination and then, obviously, become the MPP for Nepean–Carleton was that I came from a very proud riding, Nepean–Carleton, one where Sir John A. Macdonald actually had his campaign headquarters, in Moss Kent Dickinson's house, for the first two elections that he ran. Of course, Speaker, I took you once to Watson's Mill and to see Sir John A. Macdonald's wonderful campaign headquarters.

We were talking about that this past weekend at the Dickinson Days in Manotick. Of course, as everyone knows, Sir John A. Macdonald liked to have a drink or two—maybe even several more than that—and one evening he was sitting down in his chair, and he went to get up to speak but the chair fell out from under him. He stood up and he said, "I thought my seat in Carleton county was safer than that"—never one to miss an opportunity to have a good conversation.

But the people I represent have been represented by Sir John A. Macdonald. They were also represented by other legends, people I admire, some of whom I met, others whom I haven't. For example, Dr. Bill Tupper, who was the member of Parliament for 1984–88 under Brian Mulroney's government, is probably one of the most fine gentlemen that I have ever come to know: a decent human being, a professor, someone who was so steadfast in his desire to see that our monarchy was adequately respected on Parliament Hill that he actually became the person whose private member's bill created the statue for Queen Elizabeth II during that period. I was proud this year to have given him—or last year—a Diamond Jubilee Medal for his contribution to Canada.

We were also represented by Walter Baker. Some of you may have remembered his name. He was part of the short-lived Joe Clark government—Joe Clark, whom I was very proud to have worked for at one time. Walter Baker was known, I think first and foremost, as a constituency man. I can still go to a door in my riding, on any street in my riding, and people will talk about what a great gentleman Walter Baker was. He knew what it meant to be a parliamentarian, but he also knew what it meant to be a constituency politician. I can tell you something: Walter Baker valued not only the vote that got him to Parliament Hill but he also valued the dollar that was sent there to do his work. Some of the scandals that we see, whether it's here, at various city halls or even in our federal Parliament, would not have been acceptable to Walter Baker.

In Nepean–Carleton, we've also had some very strong municipal leaders. When I tell you the stories of these

individuals, I think, Speaker, you'll understand where I'm coming from when I speak about this budget.

First, the founder of the old township of Nepean was the late D. Aubrey Moodie. D. Aubrey Moodie died when he was 99 years old, but before he died, he was a supporter of mine, and he talked to me about the ways and means of politics in rural Carleton county, which is now in the big city of Ottawa. Aubrey was a builder. Aubrey was somebody who worked with the late Jean Pigott to make sure that we had wonderful green space and a greenbelt that Nepean–Carleton so much loves. Aubrey Moodie was somebody who was first to be finding a way to build the Queensway Carleton Hospital. Aubrey Moodie was a farmer. Aubrey Moodie knew that every dollar earned was a dollar that should be protected for the taxpayer. He was a fundamental founder of what is now the old city of Nepean and the new city of Ottawa, and many of the bedroom communities and rural communities that I represent.

Secondly, we were governed by Andy Haydon, who is a friend of mine. He still lives in Barrhaven. He was also one of those pay-as-you-go types. So if Aubrey Moodie started it, it was entrenched by my friend Andy Haydon. Andy Haydon, of course, was strong on fiscal conservatism and didn't want to spend money that he didn't have.

If he was the one who entrenched it, the next person, the late Ben Franklin, actually perfected the pay-as-you-go strategy that made sure that, when Nepean had to be amalgamated into the city of Ottawa in the year 2000, they were the only municipality to come into the new city of Ottawa with a substantial amount of reserves.

So, when I talk to you today, I speak as a member of provincial Parliament for a riding which has strong agrarian roots, one which is now the fastest-growing in Canada and one which has a fundamental value of self-reliance, strong families and safe streets.

It brings me to this budget and the budgets that I have had the opportunity to speak on in previous years. This budget doesn't speak to the values of the people that I represent. Pay-as-you-go is a prime example of what the people that have been elected before me and the people who will be elected after me will bring to various chambers, either here or on Parliament Hill or even at city hall in the years to come.

The people that I represent—Speaker, I think you know I probably go to about a dozen events a weekend. I'm quite busy. I often take my daughter and my husband. We're often seen in my minivan going from Bells Corners to Burritts Rapids to Edwards. It's the largest riding in the city of Ottawa, also by population, not just geography. We'll often be seen doing a number of events. This past weekend, I had the opportunity to go to Food Aid, which raised \$161,000 for the Ottawa Food Bank, while at the same time celebrating the agricultural advantages that the city of Ottawa has to offer. This was downtown at city hall.

These are events where I get to see literally hundreds or thousands of people. What I hear from time to time

from these folks is that they can't afford any more money to come to Queen's Park.

What angers them is what my colleague from Whitby-Oshawa had to talk about a little bit earlier. It's the scandals. You can't ask people for a 1% increase in the HST or a 5% increase in their gas tax or another \$300 million for photo radar and extra taxes on your cellphone bill and your home phone and 911 if you're going to waste \$1.2 billion on cancellation fees for two gas plants because somebody wanted to win an election. You can't look at people and ask them for more money if you're going to mismanage a health care system the way this government has with respect to Ornge or with eHealth. You can't continue to ask people for more money when their neighbours are losing jobs. The people who sent me to Queen's Park, who I owe everything to because they have given me this seat in this Legislature, do not approve of that waste.

1520

Not only is there waste, Speaker; they seem to be spending more money in taxes to Queen's Park without real value being seen in their communities. As I said, there are a lot of men and women in this province out of work: 600,000 people. Some 300,000 of those jobs are gone because of our manufacturing crisis. That has taken a significant toll.

I talked about doing a fundraiser with the Ottawa Food Bank last Friday, which raised \$161,000, with the support of our local farmers.

On Saturday, I had the opportunity to go to Mayfair, which is a wonderful community event hosted by the Farley Mowat Public School. While I was there, I got to talk with my friend Ken Lee, who is the head of the Barrhaven Food Cupboard. My community is quite affluent, but do you know what Ken told me at that event? He told me that in Barrhaven, our demand for food at our food bank has dramatically increased by 40% from last year. In fact, his order for food has gone in six weeks earlier this year than it did last year. That tells me that people who used to live quite comfortably are not so comfortable anymore. It's possible that one or more of them in the family household have lost their job. It's also possible that their bill payments are getting to be so hard, becoming a burden on the family income. It tells me that if this government is going to continue to tax them more, they will have less. This is a time when my constituents in Nepean-Carleton can't afford that.

I look at my constituents in North Gower. They've been fighting the invasion of a wind turbine development for years now. I promise them each and every time we meet that I will continue to stand up for them and I will continue to oppose it for three reasons. One, they should have local say on whether or not that wind turbine development goes into their community. That is something that this Liberal government has taken away from them. That's another value that is not being respected: local say, autonomy, by my community. Secondly, we know, for example, that the costs of these wind turbines are soaking all of us locally, whether it's in our own

community or it's a local business or it's in our own home. It is unaffordable. Finally, I think it needs to be said that only about 20% of the wind turbine development actually gives us energy, and I think that it's not exactly prudent to put all our eggs in that one basket.

So to the folks of North Gower, I want them to know that I'll continue to stand up for them and I will continue to be their spokesperson here and I'll continue to support them.

I also wanted to briefly touch on the horse racing community. I have a wonderful racetrack, the Rideau Carleton racetrack. It employs about 1,000 people in the city of Ottawa. There are a lot of rural jobs there, whether directly at the track or people who work and support the track throughout the rest of rural Ottawa. It concerns me that in the last budget, this Liberal government destroyed that viable economic job creator in our rural communities. At a time when we need more jobs, this is a government that has destroyed 1,000. I can't stand here and support this budget, because they didn't reverse some of the big mistakes that they had made in the past for my community.

So to the people at the Rideau Carleton Raceway, to those veterinarians, to those breeders, to those who are selling hay in order to keep their family farms, to the students who are putting themselves through Carleton University, Algonquin College or the University of Ottawa working at the track, either with the slots or in the dining room, I want them to know that I will continue to stand here in my place and I will support them.

Speaker, my colleague from Whitby is, I think, the champion of mental health and addictions in this chamber, and she spoke a little bit about that. I've had my opportunity to speak about anti-bullying; I've had my opportunity to speak on fentanyl abuse in my community, which probably goes up as a result of the economy; and I've had the opportunity to talk about autism—three issues that have been very dear to my heart.

But in order for us to properly fund these programs that we need, we need to ensure that our budget is balanced, as my colleague from Whitby-Oshawa said. When you have a \$9-billion deficit that's projected to go up to \$11.7 billion, you're going to see a lot of money being taken from core priorities to service the debt and the deficit. Remember, the third-highest spending priority of our government, outside of health care and education, is servicing the debt and the deficit. We've got to get that under control in order for us to spend on those priorities that we need. That's not happening.

As my Whitby-Oshawa colleague also pointed out, if we are to see an increase in interest rates—which is likely because right now the credit rating companies are seriously considering downgrading our credit—we're going to see even more payments go that way. I can't emphasize this enough. I speak directly to the pages here who are so young, that effectively those interest rates, when they go up, you're going to be paying more. Every time you pay more for something that you're not getting, it's money that's taken away from another priority,

whether that's health care or education or transit, roads and bridges.

Again, I don't see an overall plan here that is in keeping with the values of my constituents or the people who sent me here. I don't see any movement on accountability. I don't see any movement on supporting horse racing. I don't see any movement on supporting communities that are being assaulted by wind turbine development. I don't see a job creation strategy here. I don't see any plan whatsoever that will move the people who are right now relying on food banks into a place in their lives where they'll get into more firm financial footing.

I hear it all the time at events that it is time for a change. They are looking for hope; they are looking for optimism; they are looking for a new leader. I heard it all weekend when I was out at a dozen or so community events. I hear it wherever I go. People would like to see a change in government. They would like to see a change in how business is done in this province. That is why I stand here before you, to share that. I believe that this government has run its course. They are really, at the moment, not trusted by the people that I represent, and that is why I'll stand in my place and not only oppose this programming motion but also this Liberal budget.

I say to you as I get ready to make my concluding remarks that as this province decides it wants to embark on some very ambitious transit and transportation initiatives, it is not appropriate for them to look at my constituents and ask for 1% more on the HST. It is not appropriate for them to take more taxes off of their gasoline. It is not appropriate for them to take more taxes off of their cellphone bills. Instead, I think my colleague from Newmarket–Aurora as well as my colleague from Thornhill, have put forward a very sensible plan for a select committee that would find those efficiencies in government to pay for that new priority.

This is a government that is long on priorities, short on money and up to its eyeballs in debt. My daughter can't afford it; those pages can't afford it; and my constituency doesn't want it anymore.

So I stand here very confidently knowing that I have brought their views to the floor, the views that they shared with me at Dickinson Days this past weekend and at the Mayfair and at Food Aid, thousands of people that I was able to speak to or shake hands with or give a wave to. The one thing that they said to me this weekend that was very consistent is, "Lisa, give 'em hell." I'm prepared to do that. That is why I took this opportunity today to speak to the 2013 provincial budget on behalf of the residents of Nepean–Carleton.

I want to say thank you very much and I want to congratulate my friend and colleague from Thornhill, our finance critic, for doing an outstanding job. I also want to say in the short moments I have left that I want to thank my leader, Tim Hudak, for providing hope to the people that I represent.

1530

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Mr. Michael Harris: It's my pleasure to take this opportunity to speak to this motion on behalf of my constituents in the riding of Kitchener–Conestoga. Do you know what? We all know that living off a line of credit cannot last forever. Sure, you can renovate the house, buy a new car, get that big-screen TV you've always dreamed of, but eventually the credit runs out. And when that happens, there are only two options: You either pay down that debt or you go bankrupt.

Now, most people understand this reality and do their very best to keep their finances in order. It takes discipline, but they save money and plan their spending in order to provide for their family and prepare for a comfortable retirement. If individual Ontarians work hard to manage their finances responsibly, then they expect their government to do the same. Unfortunately, though, under the Liberals this hasn't happened.

In Ontario today, there's no saving—only debt. In fact, there's so much debt that the province's third-largest expenditure each year is its interest payments. And the cost just keeps going up. In fact, next year we'll hand over nearly \$11 billion to Ontario's domestic and international lenders. That's money that could have been used to build better hospitals, schools, roads or even the \$2-billion-a-year plan to fund Metrolinx's Big Move. Instead, that interest goes to other governments, who use our money to invest in roads, bridges and public buildings for themselves. You'd think we would try to reduce spending and pay down our debts so we could keep more of our own tax money here in the province in order to invest in creating jobs and providing first-class services for Ontarians today and into the future. But the Liberals have done the opposite yet again and increased the deficit to \$11.7 billion, which is laid out in their new budget.

Over the last two years, the Liberals have made it quite clear to Ontarians that they are primarily concerned with using taxpayers' money on protecting their own political power. We've witnessed that the Liberals would stop at nothing to win seats in the GTA by cancelling the Mississauga and Oakville gas plants. On top of that, the Auditor General reported that the Liberals covered up \$85 million of the cost to build, tear down and relocate the Mississauga plant. In addition, the Auditor General confirmed that the government knew all along that the cost would be higher than the \$190 million they repeatedly claimed it was. But again, this government continues to stretch and bend the truth to keep their support in the polls. With the combined cost of both Mississauga and Oakville, the Liberal Party wasted \$585 million of our tax money to maintain power over this province.

Although we finally know the cost of the Mississauga plant, the investigation is far from over as we continue to unveil the Oakville plant cancellation, with half a million uncovered already, deleted emails about the issue between staff and party headquarters could unveil more wasted money to simply serve their own interest.

Recently, the Premier testified before the gas plant hearings, and her response was far from what Ontarians

wanted to hear. Apologizing to Ontarians and members of this Legislature by saying “Sorry” doesn’t mean anything when the Liberals continue to refuse to take responsibility. Seniors in my riding of Kitchener–Conestoga who rely on physiotherapy in long-term care homes don’t accept “Sorry” when \$44 million has been cut from a service they rely on to prevent falls and fractures, leading to more hospitalizations. That’s \$45 million that could have been salvaged from the \$585 million that they wasted on those two plants.

These essential services for our seniors would not have been taken away if this government could spend taxpayers’ money wisely. Under these changes, the number of visits covered by OHIP for seniors in clinics will be reduced to 12 from a needed 50 visits. Bedridden seniors in retirement homes who currently qualify for 100 OHIP coverage visits will now only get six. These short-sighted cuts will lead to decreased mobility and lead to more risk of serious falls, which will move more seniors to hospitals or from the retirement home to the nursing home. With our grandparents and parents, who helped build this province, having the essential services they paid into getting taken away because of the wasteful and politically motivated spending practices, it is no wonder that Ontarians are losing faith in this Liberal government.

When I was a kid, I was taught that you say “sorry” for your actions when you actually mean it and will make a concerted effort to not make the same mistake again. Now, I didn’t have that told to me that often, but when I did, I meant it. But the Liberals’ self-interested spending policies continue. In the face of all of these scandals and cuts to important services, we’ve spent the last month watching the two parties broker a deal that will pile more debt on this province and cost us more needed jobs, simply to protect their own jobs at the expense of Ontario’s taxpayer. Now we see another billion spent to satisfy the NDP, but after almost a decade of twisted truths and countless times of the Liberals going back on their word, you would think that the NDP would learn, especially now that Ontario car insurance rates rose, in fact, despite the promised deal of a 15% cut.

The lesson must be recognized today that on-the-fly policy to appease voters and to maintain political power is not effective law-making. The truth is, Ontario simply can’t afford to have a government that spends more time and money on protecting its own partisan interests than actually carrying out true reforms that will balance our province’s books and stimulate economic growth.

The people of this province, investors, credit-rating agencies, manufacturers, young families, recent graduates and job creators all want a government that has the courage and the leadership to balance the budget and grow our economy. Unfortunately, the issues I just laid out are not what taxpayers elect their governments to do. To get our fiscal house in order, the government needs a plan. When 600,000 people woke up this morning with the stress of not having a job, the government has a responsibility to make the necessary changes to help those people get one.

Time after time, we hear from people that government’s top priority should be to reduce the deficit and pay down the debt. I hear from constituents and people across this province that our money needs to go towards the services we rely on, like health care and education, but on top of that, I hear almost every day—from emails, phone calls—or read in the headlines that the lack of employment and good paying jobs is putting stress on families, seniors and, yes, even our young graduates.

These priorities were, unfortunately, not tackled in this Liberal budget. Instead of reducing the size and cost of government to get spending under control, the Liberals chose to boost spending by increasing the size of cabinet from 23 to 27 ministries, or by 23%. They did this at a time when we already spend more money on interest payments rather than investing in a job-growth strategy plan for Ontarians.

Unlike Ontario, governments across the world, like Greece, Italy and Spain, are struggling to balance their books before ever-increasing interest payments on their countries’ enormous debts plunge them into bankruptcy. What is Ontario doing to address this unsustainable debt problem? They’re spending more. Despite repeated warnings from credit agencies, economists and, in fact, the loyal opposition, led by our leader, Tim Hudak, the Liberals and NDP passed a budget motion last week that increases spending.

Now, I know many of my constituents would like to see some of that money go towards correcting the health care funding inequity in our community of Waterloo region. For years, our region has received considerably less provincial funding for local hospital services when compared with other jurisdictions. In fact, the region receives \$255 less per resident in provincial funding than the rest of Ontario. So how can the Liberals defend sitting on their hands while spending \$10 billion a year on interest when these types of gross inequities exist?

1540

Do you know what \$10 billion could be used for? How about 5,000 MRI machines or hiring 50,000 doctors? With funding shortfalls like the one I’ve mentioned, I think it’s clear that the government can no longer continue business as usual. We need to chart a new course; one that takes us away from more debt, more spending and more taxes. To do this, we must focus the province’s resources on real priorities like jobs, the economy, education and world-class health care.

But to move forward, we must first get our own fiscal house in order. If we don’t and interest rates rise, we could face hundreds of millions of dollars in new interest payment expenses. Even a former parliamentarian admitted that the interest on the province’s debt is “a ticking time bomb.” Speaker, guess who said that? You didn’t answer me, but I know that you know whom I was thinking about and talking about: the former finance minister, Dwight Duncan himself.

I think it’s fair to say that he knows the situation is actually much more serious than the governing Liberals will admit. He knows. Everyone I talk to understands that

Ontario must deal with its spending problem. Unfortunately, we know this issue is not on the Premier's priority list. The Premier remains committed to continuing in the same failed direction of her predecessor, who, for a decade, did nothing but grow the size of government through excessive public sector hiring and pay increases.

As a result, the Canadian Federation of Independent Business has found that public sector workers earn 27% more in wages, pensions and benefits than their counterparts in the private sector for the very same job. That's certainly not affordable, but it's also not fair. Unfortunately, though, this story is a reality for too many Ontarians. Over the past decade, the province has lost 300,000 good-paying jobs in the manufacturing sector that helped to strengthen middle-class communities in places like Hamilton and the Waterloo region, where I am from.

In order to improve conditions for economic growth, leaders in the private sector have repeatedly told government for years to lower business taxes, make energy more affordable and invest in infrastructure. The Liberals didn't listen. Instead, they reneged on their promised tax cuts, they caused the price of hydro to skyrocket with their failed green energy social experiment, and they failed to adequately invest in our roads, bridges and public facilities, leaving municipalities with a \$60-billion infrastructure deficit. We've seen this story too many times. It's a bad rerun.

The Liberals remain incapable of confronting the challenges we face with real leadership. On virtually every issue, their only solution is more spending, more red tape and more bureaucracy. Take public sector hiring: When the private sector lost 300,000 manufacturing jobs, the Liberals' only solution was to add 300,000 public sector jobs to an already bloated and unaffordable government payroll.

If we want to see real change, priorities must be made. That starts with developing a comprehensive plan, which I'm proud to say the PC party has put forward. We have presented a positive vision to make Ontario a leader in Canada once again. That starts with getting government out of areas it has no business being in, so that we can focus on the things that really matter, like job creation.

When job creators are worried about our credit rating and the instability of this government, their confidence in doing business in the province goes down, and when we lose that confidence, we lose jobs. It's obvious that our local businesses are struggling. With restrictive labour laws and skyrocketing energy rates, job creators are investing elsewhere. Just last month, a company that employs 1,000 people in my riding announced it was moving south. Knape and Vogt, a manufacturer of ergonomic office supplies, publicized that it would relocate its operations to Michigan, costing 230 people their jobs. This comes just six months after the company purchased the Kitchener furniture company CompX in Waterloo. The company's vice-president, Peter Ross, said that it was not a reflection of the performance of his employees but the business marketplace here in Ontario.

Imagine, after working for the company for 25 years, a manufacturing corporation from the States comes in to take over your business, and then six months after, you lose your job, not because of the work you did or didn't do but because the company can't make a profit here in Ontario. Uncertainty continues for the hundreds of employees remaining as they see equipment sold off, weeks shortened and hours taken away. Even though the company would probably never admit it, local critics question whether the move to Michigan was related to the new right-to-work legislation which makes union membership voluntary.

Sadly, this story repeats itself in towns and cities across this province, putting thousands of people out of work here in Ontario. Take Niagara, for example. According to job site adzuna.ca, there are 100 people that compete for a job opening in that region. In Kitchener-Waterloo, approximately 73 applicants send in their resumes with only one lucky person hired, according to the same site. Finding a job is just about as hard as working in one, some would say.

So it's sad to see that this government is continuing down the same road under the unfortunate leadership of Dalton McGuinty. Being in government for 10 years, you would think the Liberal members would take the proper steps when constructing a budget, like organizing in-depth budget consultations with industry and businesses to fix our deficit in order to get Ontario working again. As a Conservative, I meet with many groups when creating legislation and making important decisions.

When developing my private member's bill on fair and open tendering, I invited CUPE to meet with me to discuss their recommendations, which actually went extremely well. I also had a round table with many local construction contractors who raised several concerns. In addition to these groups, I consulted with school boards, the federal government and the Waterloo regional council. In doing so, I heard from all perspectives what their different concerns were.

Going through the budget, I feel like the government did, in fact, not go through the same process. So I would encourage government to take a similar route, as we have done.

In fact, we have done a series of discussion white papers in the past year which would improve our economy, tackle the debt and rein in spending while providing the services Ontarians rely on. Take for example the paper entitled Affordable Energy, authored by my great colleague from Nipissing, the great Vic Fedeli. This fresh approach to Ontario's power sector recognizes that affordable energy is a fundamental element to Ontario's future economic success.

Or our other paper by Toby Barrett, Welfare to Work, which helps people on welfare rebuild their lives and develop employable skills. It advances them from the welfare system to new opportunities and stable work. Unlike the current system, which gets people stuck in the system, this new proposition gives hope in finding a job that people can be proud of.

Another white paper that focuses on unemployment is written by my great fan and colleague the member from Cambridge, Rob Leone. In his white paper, Higher Learning for Better Jobs, he tackles the problems students constantly face with finding jobs that match their postgraduate programs. Instead, we must take a different approach that gears learning towards the demands of the job market, ensuring students receive the highest quality of schooling at a sustainable cost, with the confidence of finding a good job afterwards.

The time has come. The PCs have presented a positive vision to make Ontario a leader in Canada once again. That starts with government getting out of areas it has no business being in so that we can focus on things that really matter, like job creation. We need a new approach in Ontario, which is why I'm proud to be standing here, on behalf of my constituents from Kitchener-Conestoga, opposing this budget. With reckless spending due to political motivations on cancelled gas plants and the sense of entitlements over at Ornge and eHealth, Ontarians deserve accountability for their tax dollars, a government that is accountable and transparent, and I appreciate the opportunity to speak to that today.

1550

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate.

Mr. Norm Miller: This is the first time I've had an opportunity to speak since the tragic crash of the Ornge S-76 air ambulance helicopter at Moosonee on the weekend, so I wanted to say that my thoughts are with the family and friends of the pilot, Captain Don Filliter, First Officer Jacques Dupuy, paramedic Chris Snowball and paramedic Dustin Dagenais.

Mr. Speaker, we're debating a programming motion this afternoon which—essentially, the budget motion has passed with the government and support of the NDP, the alliance. Now we're debating a programming motion which would pass the government budget bill if it receives support again from the NDP and the government, either this week or next week.

Our party does not support that programming motion because it continues the spending trend that the government has been on for the last 10 years, which is, as the member from Kitchener-Conestoga described, the government living on a credit card and racking up unsustainable debt. We see that the McGuinty-now-Wynne government has doubled the debt of the province and, as has been pointed out, that means for a new child being born in the province, their share of the credit card debt is \$20,000 right off the bat. We just think that government needs to live within its means.

From the government's own budget document, we see that the deficit is actually going up this year from what it was in 2012-13—\$9.8 billion, \$10 billion, going up to \$11.7 billion next year—and spending continues to increase despite the government talking about restraint.

All the while, the government continues to look for more ways to find more revenue. They're talking about a number of different revenue tools, as they call them, to

fund transit. In the past number of years, we've seen all kinds of other increases, like the health tax that they brought in.

They're planning on continuing their irresponsible spending.

The interest on the debt this year is \$10.6 billion, which, as has been pointed out, would be number three, if it was a ministry, in spending after health and education.

The scary part is, looking forward to 2017, that interest on the debt is forecast to be \$14.5 billion, and that's at historically low interest rates. Every time the interest rate goes up, I believe it's one point, it adds \$500 million to that interest bill.

The government needs to be responsible and get its house in order, and this budget does not do that.

This being a budget bill, it allows me a fair amount of freedom—I'm sure you will agree, Mr. Speaker—to talk about some issues in my riding of Parry Sound-Muskoka, so I'm going to do that in no particular order.

I'll start off with how I'm always amazed at the way this government is able to spin things. They made a big announcement, did a news release on physiotherapy, and it sounds like it's a great, positive initiative. The news release says:

"More Seniors to Benefit from Physiotherapy and Exercise: New Ontario Government Expanding Access to Care for Seniors."

"Ontario will provide more than 200,000 additional seniors and patients with improved access to high-quality physiotherapy, exercise, and falls prevention classes."

That sounds fantastic, Mr. Speaker, except that when you start looking at the details—and I only need to look at my local paper from last week, and what is on the cover? A demonstration in front of my office, with seniors and signs reading, "Physio for seniors' wellness"; "Seniors rally for physiotherapy access." It seems the government's great-news story has a rally in front of my office. I must admit, I have to say, why are they rallying in front of my office, as an opposition member? They should be lobbying in front of the government members' offices. However, I think they rightly felt that if they protested in front of the MPP's office, that would garner attention, and it did: Witness the cover of the Bracebridge Examiner.

Prior to this happening, I had actually already met up in Parry Sound with a concerned physiotherapist, and that was Fatemeh Khateri, who works in the Parry Sound area in long-term care. We had a good, long meeting. She was very concerned with these supposed good-news changes. She wrote me post our meeting, and I will get on the record her letter, where she says, "With a budget of \$156 million, the government says it has 'invested' in physiotherapy in Ontario, allowing thousands more seniors to access services, while MOH"—the Ministry of Health—"acknowledged that the OHIP spend on physiotherapy in 2012 was roughly \$200 million, which means the MOH announcement is actually a 22% cut to overall services (by \$44 million)." That was point 1 in her letter.

"(2) Long-term-care homes will receive \$68.5 million for their physiotherapy programming (\$58.5 million for

physiotherapy and \$10 [million] for activation exercise classes for convalescent care) ... the MOH spent approximately \$110 million" on long-term-care physiotherapy "in 2012. Their announcement is a cut of nearly 50%.

"(3) Ambulatory seniors, patients on ODSP, and children were able to access 50 to 100 treatments, depending on their medical condition, at a designated (OHIP) clinic. Now, instead of 50 or 100 treatments, patients will have access to just 12 treatments.

"(4) The government intends to earmark \$10 million" of the long-term-care budget "for exercise classes to all 75,000 LTC residents, three times per week. No allocation for equipment is included.

"If this 'group exercise budget' is divided across 633 LTC homes, it means approx. \$15,800 will be provided to the average home. It will be impossible to hire enough staff to provide classes (in a safe 1:4 ratio) to service all 75,000 residents three times per week. In addition, who will screen residents to participate in the activation programs to ensure safety?

"(5) Currently residents in LTC receive group exercise classes. Exercise classes and physiotherapy are different services and address different needs.

"As you know, your residents are receiving much more than simply group exercise classes. Each resident is assessed by a PT, current functional ability is determined and an individualized care plan is developed. This treatment plan usually includes customized 1:1 treatment, group exercise for specific impairments, or a combination of both....

"Thank you for your support of the seniors of Parry Sound.

"Best regards,
"Fateme Khateri."

We have forwarded her letter on to the Minister of Health, Deb Matthews.

I note that our critic has raised many concerns on this supposedly good-news story. Christine Elliott has, in fact, written to the Minister of Health. I'll get to that at the end of my time, Mr. Speaker, if I have time. I just want to allow time for some other issues, so I won't go through that. But I note that our background on this says, "The government has framed the issue as a good-news story announcing that it will provide 200,000 additional seniors and patients with better access to physiotherapy, exercise and fall prevention classes in long-term-care homes and in communities across Ontario.

"In fact, the ministry has removed service provision from the lowest-cost provider—designated physiotherapy clinics, which have a successful track record of providing quality care—to instead give funding to the highest-cost providers, LHINs and CCACs."

Well, that doesn't seem to make a whole bunch of sense when you have limited resources that you want to go the farthest: taking it from the lowest-cost provider and shifting it over to the highest-cost provider so the result is that seniors get less care. You can see why there are a lot of questions that come out of that physiotherapy announcement, which the government paints as being a

good-news story. If I have time at the end of my speaking comments, I'll get back to our critic's detailed letter on that.

But I did want to speak about a number of other issues that are important to the people of Parry Sound-Muskoka, starting with high water levels. This spring, in April, we had what I would call a 100-year event. I've lived on Lake Muskoka for most of my life, for 45 years, right on the water in an area that's actually on the flood plain, so I'm pretty conscious of water levels. Certainly this year in April, with the speed of the thaw and very heavy rains, we saw levels that had never been seen before. There was a lot of damage in a few different water systems, but certainly in the Huntsville area and in the Bracebridge area there were entire subdivisions that were affected. Mayor Claude Doughty in Huntsville and Mayor Graydon Smith in Bracebridge did an excellent job managing the crisis, but this high-water event, if you look around the province, wasn't simply one watershed.

1600

Certainly, the Muskoka one that I'm familiar with was greatly affected. As we were in the midst of that, I was daily calling up my friend Peter Holsgrave, who lives at the mouth of the Muskoka River, in a low area, and as he watched the water come closer and closer to his house—I think he got within six inches of it being inside his house, but his whole front yard was covered with water. I would start off every day and call him to find out if it was still going up or had stabilized. Finally, it did eventually stabilize and started going down, but it wasn't just the Muskoka water system.

Muskoka saw record highs. I live on the Black River system in the village of Vankoughnet, and have lived there for the past eight years. Well, I arrived home on a Thursday night when the torrential downpours happened, and I do have to cross the river to get to my home. In the morning, as I left at about seven in the morning, the water was over the banks of the river, but it wasn't blocking the bridge.

Well, I was gone for the day, and on that Friday, that was the day that it hit records that locals in Vankoughnet had never seen before. It went well over the bridge, and the river cut a new channel around the bridge. It meant that I didn't get back to my home for five days—on a different water system, though, than the Muskoka, heading into Lake Couchiching—and levels that locals had never seen into their lifetime, some that have lived there many, many decades.

Not in my riding, but in the Minden area, there was a couple of weeks where, in the village of Minden—again, another water system managed by the Trent-Severn organization—again saw record levels. Recently, just this past week, I've been receiving a lot of emails to do with the Pickerel River system. I want to thank Joe Whitmell, who sent me a collection of emails with stories of various people in the Port Loring area—Speaker, you'd be familiar with that—in the Pickerel River system, both in April, and then also in May, where they had some heavy rain. They've seen extremely high levels, and it's caused a lot of damage.

Depending on what's going on around this place and whether we're still in session next week, I hope to be able to attend a public meeting that's going to be at Wright Point marina in Port Loring—the marina and housekeeping resort—on the 12th, if I'm able to be there. I have spoken with Dan Feasby, who owns that business, to get information from him, and I've spoken to some of the other local folks.

I would simply say that people look to blame someone, and MNR has taken their share of blame. I have also spoken with Steve Taylor, who's their water management coordinator in the Muskoka area, and I think, generally, that they've done a pretty good job. There are questions in the Pickerel River system, though; the locals are raising some good questions that I hope will be answered—that they'll take the advice of the local people about how to better manage the system and lessen the damage.

You can't manage for 100-year events, but hopefully you can manage as best as possible. Their concern is that upstream on the Pickerel River, you have the North Bay MNR office managing the system, and downstream, the Dollars Lake dam is managed by the Parry Sound district, I believe out of the Bracebridge office. You have two different offices, and the complaint from some of the local people is that they remove logs upstream, but then the Dollars Lake dam is very difficult to access, and they don't tend to remove the logs on that one until quite a bit after.

I have a letter from Dan Feasby pointing out that concern, and obviously they want to see the system managed so they have less damage. I look forward to hopefully being able to attend that June 12 meeting. If I'm not able to attend that meeting, then I will attend another meeting up there to deal with that issue.

Another very important issue: As we have flooding around Parry Sound—Muskoka, we also have, on the Georgian Bay side, historic low-water levels. It's kind of interesting that that's the big issue on Georgian Bay, Lake Huron and Lake Michigan. On that issue, I have met with marina operators from the Honey Harbour area whose immediate concern in the past few months has been being able to have dredging permits expedited, and I'm pleased to say that MNR did come up with a process to speed up the dredging permit process that they are involved with to help some of these marina operators who would find, in many cases, a third of a marina unusable for the coming season if they weren't able to dredge, and there are certain times when you can dredge.

That's the short-term problem. Longer term, it's the water level on the two middle lakes, being Huron and Michigan. Recently, there was the FONOM—Federation of Northern Ontario Municipalities—meeting in Parry Sound. I was pleased to attend that. I have attended meetings with mayors around the Georgian Bay communities who have drafted a resolution that many of the communities have been passing. If I get a chance, I'll read that into the record.

At FONOM, I was pleased to sit down with Premier Wynne, a representative of Archipelago township and a

number of the marina operators, who put a very good presentation with lots of photos showing historic water levels and pointing out the need for dredging just to be able to stay in business, and also looking at the long term.

I'm also pleased—because this isn't just a provincial issue, and not even just a federal issue; it's an international issue—that, for the first time, the International Joint Commission has actually recognized and recommended that there needs to be some control on the outflow of Lake Huron, because you have controls on all parts of the Great Lakes, but not on those middle lakes. So the St. Clair River is the drain of Lake Huron and Lake Michigan, and it has historically been dredged. That might be part of the reason why we've had this now 14-year downward trend in water levels. It may not be. But it certainly makes sense to me that if you want to have some sort of minimum, there needs to be a restriction on the outflow of Lake Huron. So I'm glad to see that the IJC is recommending that. I believe they suggest some sort of inflatable device to slow down the flow so you could have a minimum level maintained on Lake Huron.

You may not think that's a big issue, but it's worth billions of dollars to the people on those middle Great Lakes: businesses that depend on water levels, people who own waterfront property and can't get access. It's important for the environment too—maintaining wetlands. So it is a really important issue and one that I certainly hear about from the municipalities.

Mr. Speaker, somehow I'm only at item number three of the long list of issues I wanted to talk about, and I only have a couple of minutes left in my time. So I will just briefly say, as the northern critic, that it seems like the north is just not getting a fair shake with this government. If you look at the record of the government, they continue their trend of making Toronto-centric decisions. They passed the Far North Act, which puts half of the far north off bounds. That's something that I, in a private member's bill, would like to repeal. I think we certainly need land use planning in the north, but land use planning means using the land primarily for the benefit of northerners and First Nation communities, but for all Ontario.

As northern critic, I have to say there has been so little activity on the Ring of Fire. The McGuinty government was talking about how important this was four or five years ago. Now, here we are, five years later, and nothing has happened. It's fairly straightforward—you need a road or rail connection to the Ring of Fire—and precious little has happened.

They announced a deal with Cliffs Natural Resources a year ago, with a smelter in Sudbury and a north-south road. Well, now it's silence; nothing has happened. We need those jobs. The First Nation communities, the northern communities, all Ontario needs those jobs, and yet we see no activity.

You look at the things this government has done with the north. It seems that whenever they want to save money—one of the things that struck me when I did the finance committee hearings in Thunder Bay was that one

of the programs where they decided to save money was the Junior Ranger Program. It's been going on for 68 years. They saved \$1.6 million, I believe. People came and talked about how it was a life-changing experience for them, how they had been in the program and it had formed what they did for the rest of their lives. This government can blow \$600 million on a couple of gas plants, and they want to save \$1.6 million shutting down a program that's been very valuable for many people, especially in the north.

1610

When they close parks, they close most of them in the north—10 of the provincial parks in the north. They shut visitor information centres down—they shut them down in the north. So it seems like when they look to money, the first place they try to save any money is in the north, and not necessarily in a smart way.

I can see, Mr. Speaker, that I'm out of time. Thank you for the opportunity to speak this afternoon.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Ms. Catherine Fife: I rise today to speak to the programming motion for the 2013-14 budget that allowed New Democrats to continue what we have been doing since 2011: getting results for families.

I would like to use my time today to speak specifically to one aspect of the programming motion, one which I and every New Democrat are proud of. I am speaking, of course, about the Financial Accountability Office. I'd like to take the opportunity to provide a bit of a lesson to my colleagues in the official opposition about this office; just a few facts and a bit of clarification on what the objective of this office is.

I know their caucus is on the record as having opposed the budget—opposed the very budget process, in fact, even prior to reading the budget—so they might not have been playing close attention to the portion of the programming motion that explains the Financial Accountability Office. What led me to believe that my colleagues from the PC caucus might not have been paying attention was something the member from Barrie said in the House last Thursday. On May 30, regarding the Financial Accountability Office and the effect it would have on MPPs right here in this House, he said that "nobody could argue against having more accountability in our system, and certainly not Progressive Conservatives. The trouble with this establishment of the FAO is that the mechanism for accountability is taken out of the hands of the members of this very Legislature." Quite the contrary, Mr. Speaker.

I think that a little bit of fact will enhance the fictional story that we are hearing from this side of the House on the existence and creation of the FAO. Just the facts, Mr. Speaker. What will actually happen is that members in this House—their powers will be enhanced, giving them the authority to request, formally, assessments from the FAO on proposed government spending. I think that it's important to acknowledge that this is not something that we currently have as MPPs. This is not a power that we

have within the grasp. I think that a lot of MPPs in this House would appreciate having the ability to gain specific financial information as we move forward.

Even the Auditor General—and it's quite curious for me—requires a committee to request its attention. I'll read this from the standing orders to prevent any confusion. The Auditor General, pursuant to section 17 of the Auditor General Act, "shall perform such special assignments...." It goes on to say what those special assignments must be. Accountability, though, in our estimation is not a special assignment. It certainly is not just "interesting," which is how the Liberals have described it. We actually regard accountability as indeed necessary for any government going forward.

I know that the members from the NDP have actually been out and talking to people in their constituencies, and the Financial Accountability Office has traction. People understand what we are trying to do. I think that they recognize that it's very much needed.

The Financial Accountability Office may also undertake an assignment by any member of the Legislature. So my newfound friend from Thornhill would not have been able to twist himself into a pretzel just to get the information from the government. He would have a clear avenue, a clear venue, to seek that information. It would be within his rights as a member. It would give him increased oversight and power to represent the financial needs of the people who are in his constituency, and together we could ensure that this government is truly accountable.

Interjection.

Ms. Catherine Fife: I think that he's already said he's going to vote for it; that's awesome.

I also want to point out that this Financial Accountability Office is unprecedented. It is historical. There is no other office like it anywhere in Canada—not in another province; not in Ottawa. The FAO is modelled after the Parliamentary Budget Officer but it is, in fact, stronger, more independent and of greater utility to individual members of the Legislature than the Parliamentary Budget Officer at the federal level.

The federal parliamentary budget office, you may be interested to know, is a member of the Library of Parliament; they are not an independent office. The Financial Accountability Office would truly be independent so that they could conduct unbiased financial analysis, and while the parliamentary budget office can request the release of information from the government, it cannot order the release of information. The Financial Accountability Office would be able to order the release of documents, much like the Information and Privacy Commissioner.

This office of financial accountability is exactly what traditional PC supporters want. It appeals to the base of traditional Progressive Conservatives—increased financial oversight, increased power. Why there is such resistance to this office—quite honestly, we're struggling with it. If you had participated in the budget process, you probably would have injected this idea into the office going forward, because you know what? It's a good idea.

Feel free to put it on whatever literature you want and just give us a little thank you note at the bottom of the brochure, because everyone in this province wants greater financial accountability from Queen's Park.

We often hear from members of the official opposition on those issues they have with the Financial Accountability Office, and they also decry the province's spending crisis, the fiscal crisis, the amount of red ink on the province's books, yet they didn't do anything about it going forward with the budget. They have been hounding the government, to their credit—and we've actually participated in some of that hounding, for the most part—about the gas plants in Oakville and Mississauga, about Ornge, about eHealth, about the chemotherapy drugs. These are cases in point as to why we need this financial officer, and yet they lament the existence of oversight groups. They say it would cost too much. They say we have too much oversight already. How can that possibly be? They say the FAO would be just another roadblock to getting information, and yet the cost is what often comes up in this House as a roadblock to this progressive idea.

I just want to review some of the cost savings. The savings achieved by enhancing fiscal scrutiny across the government are expected to far exceed the estimated costs of the proposed office. I'll give you an example of some of these other offices and commissions that we actually have in the province: the Environmental Commissioner, \$3.7 million; the Office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner, \$15 million; the Ombudsman of Ontario, \$11 million. Imagine if the Ombudsman actually had oversight over health care. Think of the money that we would save if we had a Financial Accountability Officer who could actually oversee what's happening in our long-term-care facilities and in our hospitals and how we haven't even addressed the need for early intervention and prevention in the health care portfolio to save millions and millions of dollars. So there's no strong argument whatsoever around the resistance to the FAO on the cost. This is a progressive idea. It makes financial sense. And yet we continue to hear resistance to the Financial Accountability Office.

I have to think that perhaps this is just resistance in general, because we've seen from the opposition a resistance to having a discourse and a debate about what we're trying to do here. What New Democrats have said is that we've come to the table and put forward some very needed plans and strategies to enhance and strengthen the province of Ontario:

—a youth employment strategy, which was embedded into the budget;

—the issue of auto insurance and affordability and reprioritizing the finances in this province to make sure that we can put forward progressive ideas on public transit, and that's actually what we're going to do;

—the whole issue of home care. My goodness, if we had not brought forward the issue of those 6,200 people on that wait-list after 10 years of Liberal government, I'm quite certain that wait-list would still be the painful reality of people in this province.

The PCs have sort of said, "We're just going to put the brakes on all ideas." I think that it's frustrating us because we think the people in this province actually want politicians to work more. They want us to work harder and they want us to try to get results for them.

Back to the FAO, it will be unique in its scope, in its independence from government, in its ability to stop spending scandals before they start. This is another angle, another aspect of the FAO that I thought would have appealed to the opposition, because it's an ounce of prevention before—it's a scandal preventer. This office has the ability to stop scandals in their tracks.

1620

I mean, think if we had been more proactive, for instance, on the drug oversight issue with the chemotherapy. Think if we had been able to go to the Financial Accountability Office and say, "This has been going on for five years. We have been hearing from people in the community. We've seen that one thousand people received watered-down chemotherapy drugs. Where is the oversight? What is the cost? What is the cost savings?"

Health care is one of our independent, fundamental values as a province, just like public education is. Think of what the Financial Accountability Officer could have done with Bill 115: costed out the court cases that are still ongoing; costed out the emotional and perhaps the financial strife that that piece of legislation brought to public education in the province of Ontario.

This office is unique in that it is a preventive measure to stop the waste of taxpayers' money. I think it's long overdue, and I think the potential to actually move forward progressive ideas in financially responsible way is something that has been a long time coming to this House.

As I mentioned, it's a historic piece, it's a historic idea, and it has actually broadened the scope of the federal Parliamentary Budget Officer, who, quite honestly, gave Stephen Harper quite a hard time. That fellow—I guess he would be described as a thorn in the side of Stephen Harper, and quite honestly, anybody who is a thorn in the side of Stephen Harper is a friend of mine.

I think this is really important for those on this side of the House who really struggle with getting the financial stats, getting the financial records from this government. All of us have fought to get the truth, through FOI requests, through official requests, through the auditor.

If it wasn't for the work that the estimates committee did last spring, we would be in a very different place today. Having had to drag out for a whole year of strife and debate and acrimony in this place—we could have actually been talking about progressive transit ideas, for instance, or the 21st-century requirements of public education, not just the cuts by a thousand cuts to arts and music programs, but broadening the conversation that we need to be having in this province on public education.

It's unprecedented, actually, that this level of accountability will now be brought to Queen's Park. That's what New Democrats are bringing to Queen's Park. Now, I understand that my friends in the official opposition

might be anxious to discuss those successes, what with the problems that have happened, actually, at the federal level. Just to give you an example, Mr. Kevin Page posed for their federal cousins just a huge amount of resistance to some of the very basic ideas that the federal cousins of the PCs put forward, most especially the Parliamentary Budget Officer's reassessment of the estimated full cost of the F-35 fighter jets, for instance. At that point in time, Mr. Kevin Page said that the true cost of those fighter jets would be \$29 billion, including upgrade costs of \$3.9 billion—much higher than the \$9 billion that the Department of National Defence had publicly estimated. Can you imagine? Some \$9 billion is proposed by National Defence. Mr. Page looks through the report, combs through the finances and comes out with the true cost: \$29.3 billion, almost \$30 billion.

And just think of the potential of what could have happened before those gas plants got moved, before we started privatization within the health care system. Think of the potential, from a preventive peace of mind.

If the PCs are in fact interested in a more thorough discussion about financial accountability, they should do as the members of the government caucus are doing, and that is to follow the New Democrats' lead and support the historic creation of the Financial Accountability Office.

There is a real trust issue here; we are in agreement with that. The people of this province are actually in agreement with the fact that there is a serious trust issue here in the province of Ontario. Yet we have brought forward an idea, a concept, of true accountability which will enhance the trust back in this place.

One of the issues that we've heard from Ontarians throughout our conversations before the budget and then after the budget was that Ontarians want to have trust in their government and they want us to work harder and they want us to put the people of this province first. By ensuring that there is true financial accountability with their money when they send us here to Queen's Park, we will be honouring that trust. We actually feel very strongly about that responsibility on this side of the House. That's why the New Democratic proposals for the budget were very clear. Our proposals that we put forward throughout the budget process were costed out, and they were clear about the results that people in this province would achieve.

The Financial Accountability Office would start to rebuild some of the trust people have in their government. Right now, people don't believe that they can trust the government's numbers, and, truly, who could blame them?

We just heard this morning, in question period, that the Minister of Health has said that every home in this province has been inspected, that there has been a thorough inspection of every long-term-care facility in this province, when our numbers are very different. Actually, we have heard from people in the long-term-care facilities that those inspections have been subpar, that they have just been surface, that they have not gotten

to the very issue of patient safety, patient integrity and the safety of workers in those homes, as well. This is another issue that we have to remain vigilant about. Those are the most vulnerable seniors in the province of Ontario, and they cannot always advocate for themselves, and they are relying on us to do so.

With the slow, painful process of getting the true cost of the cancelled gas plants in Oakville and Mississauga from the government, numbers that seem to fluctuate week by week, Ontarians have every right not to believe what the government is telling them about the cost of various programs. Frankly, that's a sad state of affairs for us.

Yet, if this office comes into place, it is an opportunity for us to go back to the people to explain that they truly have an advocate in this place and that New Democrats are supportive of the powers of the Financial Accountability Office to ensure that every single dollar that they brought into this place through tax revenues goes to responsible spending, goes to programs that meet their needs and are not wasted.

We need the people of this province to have more faith in their elected representatives, not less. That trust in government is the foundation of our democracy. We need their engagement in Queen's Park, to ensure that we are actually doing our job. In order to get that engagement, we need that trust to be re-established. The Financial Accountability Office would give people reason to trust again, no matter the spending scandals any given government has cooked up. I think that this is really important.

Just for the record, just so that we stay with the facts, I want to read one of the key pieces that is in the mandate of the Financial Accountability Office. It's actually in the legislation. The Financial Accountability Office will "undertake research into the estimates and all legislation of the government and opposition members." So it empowers opposition members to give them the financial oversight that they require.

It will also "undertake research to estimate the financial cost of any proposal that would impact the province's finances and that relates to a matter over which the Legislature has jurisdiction including government agencies and ministries."

Finally, it would "undertake research into the province's finances and trends in the provincial and national economies."

So this is a proactive office. We will get to the waste before it happens. This is a smart way—in the traditional sense, it's a very conservative concept: You evaluate your spending priorities before you spend the money. You do true consultation. You share the strategy and the proposal before it goes out into the broader community and before gas plants get moved around the province like chess pieces.

It is certainly a way for us, as New Democrats, to ensure that this government is truly accountable for the funding that, quite honestly, has been wasted. If we can get the waste under control, we can actually reprioritize the spending in this province to ensure that we build

healthier communities, that we build a stronger education system, that we address the environmental issues that are ongoing, and that we get the energy portfolio under control, because it is a mess.

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This is what we need from the third party—and from the opposition party, for that matter. This is something that we should all agree on. This is something that this province needs. The Financial Accountability Office is a pragmatic idea brought forward by New Democrats to serve the people of this province, and I'm so pleased that we have the opportunity to do so.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The member for Newmarket–Aurora on a point of order.

Mr. Frank Klees: I regret to interrupt the debate, but I would like to correct my record. In my statement earlier today, in referring to the Ornge air ambulance crash, in my tribute to the first responders, I referred to primary care flight paramedic Chris Snowball as being 41 years of age. He was 38 years of age, if the record could be corrected, please.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Thank you very much.

Further debate?

Mr. Peter Shurman: I'm pleased to add my voice to those who are debating what we call a substantive motion.

I think it's probably in order at this point to take a few minutes, look at that television camera right there and say that if you're watching me—on channel 105 here in the GTA, or however you may receive the Ontario Legislature channel, wherever you are in the province of Ontario—and you're completely lost and you're one of the 10 long-suffering souls who are sticking it out and trying to figure out what's going on, or if you're in Thornhill and know that I'm going to speak about some of the things that affect you, nice to see you.

What we're trying to do here is debate a motion that addresses—and I think I'm paraphrasing correctly—the speedy passage of the budget bill, which is not being debated right now. This is a motion that would ensure speedy passage of the budget bill. We have been debating this motion for speedy passage for four days, so that tells you something about how this place works. And I'm delighted that there are so many Liberals in this House right now to hear what I have to say about this, because I think it's important.

But before I get on with any form of presentation, I haven't personally addressed, in or outside of this House, any aspect of the Financial Accountability Office. So although it's not required of me to respond to my friend from Kitchener–Waterloo, I feel that I must say a few words about her 20-minute presentation on the reason for the third party's wish to establish a Financial Accountability Office, which now, as people in this House know, and some people outside know, forms part and parcel of the package that the NDP has formed with the Liberals in order to ensure their support for this budget. I haven't

said anything about it—positive, negative or in between—but I want to say a couple of things.

She imputes to me, or at least to my party, the fact that we're on record as opposing the budget, that we're on record as opposing the budget process. The fact of the matter is, we won't be voting for the budget, and she knows that.

But the only thing we're really on record for is that we oppose this government. The reason that we said a couple of months ago that we were not going to go through with this budget charade—because we've been through it too many times before, and I'll get on to more amplification on that in a few moments—is because we don't trust this government to deliver what it says, much less to do what it implies.

So in terms of what we oppose, we oppose the government and, frankly—I'll go on record right now and I'll say it—we oppose the behaviour of the third party, the NDP—dare I say, the duplicitous behaviour of the NDP—in, on the one hand, standing up in the morning—

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Parliamentary language. Come on. Seriously?

Mr. Peter Shurman: "Duplicitous" just means "two-way." It's not pejorative.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I have to ask the member for Thornhill to withdraw his unparliamentary remark.

Mr. Peter Shurman: I will withdraw the use of that word.

I have to say—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): You have to rise and say, "I withdraw," without any explanation or qualification.

Mr. Peter Shurman: I withdraw.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Thank you. I return to the member for Thornhill.

Mr. Peter Shurman: Let me go on record, then, and say that I find it somewhat strange that I'm being lectured by a member of the third party, which has worked with a government that for most of a year it has criticized up, down and sideways, called everything from the implication that it's lying to the fact that it is a completely untrustworthy body with which to work. But there it is supporting it.

But don't worry, I'm told the Financial Accountability Office will ensure that we're not going to have any problems in the future. I find that rather difficult to believe. How is a Financial Accountability Office going to intervene before the fact to ensure that somebody doesn't get half-strength chemo drugs? It just doesn't make any sense to me. However, I respect the member from Kitchener–Waterloo, and I thank her for her explanation.

Let me move on with discussing a couple of things that have directly to do with the budget that we're trying to speedily pass. I have with me, not props, but three copies of budgets: the current year, the year before that and the prior year, so I go back to 2011. This is the 2011 Ontario budget under the Honourable Dwight Duncan,

then Minister of Finance—a pretty book; they all look about the same, have some nice pictures on them—called Turning the Corner to a Better Tomorrow. That's what they wanted to do in 2011—a very nice idea. They were going to turn the corner and get us out of the financial woes we were in and the mounting debt crisis that they claimed came as almost a complete result of the recession a couple of years prior to that.

I guess they didn't turn the corner very well, because the next year, 2012, they decided that they were going to address their budgetary woes by bringing out another book, and this budget was called Strong Action for Ontario. I guess they didn't turn the corner. Strong Action for Ontario didn't imply; it meant that in that budget they were going to address aspects of how the province operates in a way that was somewhat different, and I guess with more teeth, than what they had prior to that.

They said at the time that they were going to deal, for example, with government unions—and there are about 4,000 collective agreements—in a new way. They were going to demand zeros in terms of wage increases for two years, at a minimum. Then they kind of amplified that and said, "We have to balance the budget; that's the first order of business." They didn't do that. As a matter of fact, it kind of culminated in Bill 115, the now infamous Bill 115, where they were going to war with the teachers, and they decided that they would give up the war. They cancelled Bill 115 and they gave the teachers more than they were originally planning to do. I'll address a little bit more of that as I get into the presentation, because the teachers were the beginning. That was the opening of the door to not staying at zeros. So that was strong measures.

Strong measures also meant we were going to reform the arbitration system so that we wouldn't cost the people of Ontario so much in dealing with our government unions through arbitration, and it also was going to deal with privatizing some services where that made sense. So all of that was not a given that would allow us to accept the budget, but we kind of thought, well, maybe the Liberals are getting a little bit of religion, because they were using at least some of the language that Progressive Conservatives believe is necessary when you're trying to right a foundering ship, which, there is no question, this province is.

So out goes Dalton McGuinty, back in the fall of last year, over a scandal that continues to plague his memory even today, and plagues this government today, that involves essentially misappropriation of funds, which they virtually admit to, to stop the building of two gas plants that, had they been completed or continued, would have, by their own admission, lost them some seats. So we have a committee that's hard at work on that. We've got about 130,000 documents that attest to some of the goings-on. We've had the Premier and the former Premier testify at committee—all kinds of things like that.

Things change under Premier Kathleen Wynne and there's a new finance minister, the Honourable Charles Sousa. The book's about the same size. It's a slightly different colour—it looks black, a bit ominous. But this

time it's not Strong Action; it's A Prosperous and Fair Ontario. That's what Minister Sousa is talking about.

But, you know, I discovered something, Speaker: If you take a really close look at this picture on the front cover and you're a conspiracy theorist and you read books like Dan Brown's—he's the fellow who wrote The Da Vinci Code. If you look really closely at this picture, up in the corner—and I don't know if the camera can catch me here or if we're on high-definition television, but I'll read it. It says, "Trustworthiness.... Tell the truth." That's what it says. It's not a prop. It says, "Trustworthiness.... Tell the truth." I have never seen a message in those pictures in all the years I've been here. I suspect that that is Minister Sousa channelling Dalton McGuinty. That's what it must be. Otherwise, why would you put it there?

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Anyway, a bit of a jest, but the fact of the matter is, I question how you can manage an economy by putting out budgets in succession that address the economy in so many different ways and still wind up with the same result. This is probably the reason why every once in a while in debate here I mention Einstein and his theory about the definition of insanity.

By way of demonstrating what it is we're trying to get to in this motion, we're trying to get to polishing off the business that involves putting the bill that enacts this budget, Bill 65, An Act to implement Budget measures and to enact and amend various Acts, through this Parliament. Let me give an example, again, sort of show and tell, of what happens one year when you decide you are actually going to make change, whether you are able to effect it or not, and what happens in another year when you say, "We're going to try to play it cool with another party and get this budget through" for political purposes. This is the bill, and it's about one inch thick, that became law last year, Bill 55. This is the budget that ended March 31, and, I might say, ended in a way that was quite different than a booklet that outlined the budget said it would be. This little skinny one—I don't think it's an eighth of an inch thick—is Bill 65, which we're trying to get to this year, which doesn't leave very much room for manoeuvring, and this motion leaves virtually none at all because it calls for about a day of public hearings. That's the difference between what they've done and they're doing.

I don't want to spend an awful lot more time on the budget; I'd rather talk about some measures that could have been in this budget, and I want to talk about them from the standpoint not of being the critic for finance for the Progressive Conservative Party but rather the member of provincial Parliament for Thornhill. In exchanges this morning between myself and the Minister of Finance—and my leader, Tim Hudak, and the Minister of Finance—we talked about some things that could be done in terms of savings rather than the kinds of approaches that this government wants to take.

The government wants to solve its deficit problem by getting more money out of you through different

measures, not by savings. We believe that it's possible to bring the deficit down by saving money at the budgetary level.

Let me talk about a couple of things that have come my way in the past week or two and that are ongoing. In Thornhill, there's an area of town called Centre Street. Centre Street cuts about right through the middle of my riding. It's a wide street, but it goes right through a highly residential neighbourhood with a little bit of light retail in it. It has been the subject of some discussion because it is the only place where a 25-kilometre-long transitway, busway, dedicated busway that runs along all of Highway 7, pretty well all of Highway 7—certainly the parts of it that run through my riding, which are Markham and Vaughan. It never deviates from Highway 7 with the exception of one little area of half a kilometre, and that's along Centre Street, ostensibly to get that express bus down Bathurst along Centre Street to pick up some commuters or drop them off and then take them back to Highway 7. Why? That would be the only half-kilometre stretch in 25 kilometres of busway. Nobody seems to understand, but that is precisely what they want to do.

Here's the thing that connects it to us from a budgetary perspective. The people in Thornhill don't want it, and the people in Thornhill don't need it. Yet this government is going to persist with it through Metrolinx, which is not an organization with all of the screws in the proper places, as far as I'm concerned. They're going to spend \$100 million to do it at a time when we're also discussing something called revenue tools, which are really, by any other name, taxes—a suite of taxes—when they could save \$100 million, and I'm telling them how. I'm very hard-pressed to understand that.

What it effectively would do, for all of you watching in the rest of the province who don't know Thornhill: If you have been in Toronto and you've seen Spadina or if you've been in Toronto and you've seen St. Clair, where they basically have streetcars running up the middle of the street that gum up traffic like you wouldn't believe—that's what they want to do in a lovely bedroom suburb called Thornhill. That's the intent: \$100 million to do that, and nobody knows why.

Let me tell you about eating disorders—talk about a segue. This was another group that came to see me recently on a constituency day. These people are from an organization called NIED; that's an acronym for National Initiative for Eating Disorders. It may sound like a specious comment for the middle of the debate on the budget, but I tell you this is really important stuff. The three ladies who came to see me, either directly or through their families, have been very much affected by this. There is a serious need for further support for treatment but there's also a need for education and prevention, and we don't spend any money on it.

This is a mental illness. It is not—obviously not—a priority for this Liberal government. Those with the disorder often have to seek treatment outside of the country. They actually have to leave and go to the United

States to get treatment for it. I have to tell you, we're talking here about 55,000 people in Ontario who have an eating disorder. Contrary to popular thought, this is not just females who want to be skinny. That's what comes to mind immediately. It's kind of like talking about deadbeat dads; there are also deadbeat moms.

Well, there are not just thin, little teenage females who suffer from an eating disorder; there are a lot of people—55,000 in total—in our province. There is a 20% mortality rate associated with this, and we don't treat this as it should be treated. We don't have an appropriate treatment in this province for it. So I congratulate the people of NIED. This is something that should be reflected in our budget.

Lastly I want to talk about something that has been the subject of petitions and questions on the floor that has to be addressed because there is imminent danger to all of us, coming on August 1, as the rules are changed on physiotherapy in this province. The health minister has to sit up and take notice because, essentially, we're looking at some very, very serious consequences. The rules have changed.

Last year the ministry spent about \$110 million on physiotherapy in long-term care; now the funding is being reduced to \$58 million—very significant. I said "in long-term care," so the funding may not be reduced in total, but it's coming out of long-term-care homes.

Now, what people may not know, as of this morning—I sought out and got the accurate information—we have about 21,000 people waiting for a long-term-care space somewhere—21,000 people in the province of Ontario—and these spaces don't exist. The number of visits covered by OHIP for seniors in clinics will be reduced from 50 to 12, and people who are in long-term-care homes won't have direct access in those long-term-care homes. This is all short-sighted, and it's a cut that is going to negatively impact the health of Ontarians and very particularly these seniors. Seniors will no longer be able to directly access physio services from their retirement homes and instead they have to access it through their local CCAC or an external community clinic. Many of these patients are already frail and have mobility problems.

Do you know what's going to happen? This will lead to more falls. It'll lead to fractures. It'll lead to respiratory conditions resulting in more hospitalization and additional costs to the system. It will result in bed sores. Bed sores become infected. It will result in pneumonia. It will result in increased cases of C. difficile.

The McGuinty-Wynne Liberals have touted their wait time reductions, but I'm going to say something that is somewhat of a lightning rod: I honestly believe that there may be a Machiavellian scheme involved here that involves increasing the mortality rate in long-term-care homes so that they can accommodate people who are sitting on a 21,000-person wait-list. Isn't that a hideous thing? Isn't that—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I'm going to ask the member for Thornhill to withdraw that unparliamentary statement that he just made.

Mr. Peter Shurman: I withdraw.

The bottom line here is that we have taken a look at a lot of things that have gone on here in the province of Ontario under various incarnations of this Liberal government. But what we know is that they have created the highest deficit in history, uncontrollably spent beyond their means, and now they want additional taxes. They want additional taxes through a variety of things in the name of transit and infrastructure. We hear the term “revenue tools.” We’ve heard terms in the past like “premiums.” We’ve heard a lot of things about additional taxes. You can call them what they want, but that’s what they are.

We take a look at the spending that has created the need; things like the Green Energy Act, which we’re now seeing a climb down on—where we begged, literally begged from this side of the House, the then Liberal energy minister not to go through with what he wanted to do. We tried to present amendments to that act, and what do we have? We have the FIT program being cancelled now. We had a Samsung deal at the time that was going to create all kinds of jobs, and what have we got? We’ve got a chronic unemployment rate of 7.7%, and 500,000, 600,000 people who don’t have a job here in the province of Ontario right now.

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What does it say? It says that what we’re looking for is for the people who paid the taxes, with the expectation of receiving service delivery from the province of Ontario, where the services weren’t delivered, the money was squandered on gas plants or eHealth plans or whatever it happened to be—Ornge—it was misspent. Now the bailout for this is supposed to come through these things called revenue tools, or through a variety of about 50 different initiatives we started to outline this morning, in documents that we’ve seen that were used to brief cabinet back in January. All of these things—we, the taxpayers, are supposed to bail these people out.

That’s my contribution to a motion that’s supposed to deal with speedy passage of a budget—and, I might say, a budget that is the work of a government and its accomplice, the third party, that we absolutely and unequivocally cannot support.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Mr. Toby Barrett: As we know this afternoon, we’re told that the substantive motion we’re debating is designed to speed up the passage of the budget bill and get it through the House and get it through committee. Given the Wynne budget’s recipe for more bilking of taxpayers—again, to pay for a continued, 10-year spending spree—that’s about the last thing I want to see happen right now.

In fact, instead of supporting this government, instead of supporting this budget, I feel we should be supporting our friends opposite, on the government side. Perhaps we can offer some suggestions for help with respect to the spending problems we’ve seen over the past 10 years.

You know, the first step to recovery is admission—admission of the problem. We have a new Premier—

unelected—and as the saying goes, “Meet the new boss, same as the old boss.” I think of the very simple words: “My name is Kathleen and I’m a spendaholic.” It would do us all well to reflect on that phrase.

Ms. Wynne has made it very clear she will continue the legacy of one Dalton McGuinty, also known as Dalton the debt doubler, one who introduced a new affliction of dependence in the lexicon, a phrase known locally as the “Dalton deficit disorder.”

As we know, Ontario’s projected \$411.4-billion debt is largely the result of 10 years of accumulated deficits. Speaker, I suggest we are all enablers if we condone not attempting to pay down these shortfalls, these deficits, if we are in a continued position of irresponsibly leaving these accumulated deficits and this particular debt to our children.

We do see signs of addiction with every new money grab that this government is taking, willing to use any means necessary to feed that addiction, bilking those very same taxpayers it purports to represent.

It puts me in mind of the phone scams, the email scams, taking advantage of those who can least afford it. I mention this—there is a very sad story locally, reported in our daily newspaper last Friday, a well-written report on the breakdown of a very large scam, a fraud. Again, I make the analogy to what I’m seeing with the subtraction of money from taxpayers by this particular government.

I think of Metrolinx. I’m thinking back to the Simcoe Reformer headlines that I was reading on Friday about an unfortunate victim. This lady lost well over \$700,000 to a “Nigerian-style scam.”

I’m really concerned about 20 years of Metrolinx. We know the projected subtraction from taxpayers will be \$50 billion. I’m concerned that I may read some future headlines like, “The Ontario Taxpayer Thought She Found Love. Instead, She Was Bilked out of \$50 Billion.” We have seen many of these kinds of newspaper headlines.

Here’s another phrase I was reading on Friday: “The fraud was sophisticated, elaborate, and clever, and started out small.” Oftentimes they start out large. When the victim objects or gets suspicious, they backtrack a bit and ask for slightly less money. Regrettably, oftentimes they get the money. Again, in this newspaper article—and I was thinking of Metrolinx when I was reading the story—“by the time it was over,” she “was out of her life savings.”

Indeed, we should all be looking at our savings as a province and as individuals. After five years of study, we see a government that recently announced a \$50-billion plan to build subsidized subways and Toronto transit. My question: Who will be paying for this? It’s something I think we should all be asking, just like the hapless victims in what reports refer to as Nigerian-style scams. The designers of this plan are obviously taking aim directly at our wallets.

Of the \$16 billion spent so far on Toronto’s transit, \$13 billion came from the Ontario taxpayer. As for the remaining \$34 billion, again I suggest to the people of Ontario: Hang on to your wallet. Most of Toronto’s

Metrolinx spending so far came, again, from the Ontario taxpayer, not from the Toronto region—no regionalization there. As we know, the best predictor of future behaviour—we're talking about a 20-year plan—is past behaviour. These are the kinds of schemes a provincial government dreams up to feed its need to spend more, and we have the figures from this year's budget: \$3.6 billion more in this budget alone.

When I speak to this substantive motion, it is with a concern over the possibility that if we don't speak out now and we don't draw a line in the sand, we in fact all become enablers, and essentially taxed-out enablers and financially drained enablers at that. Again, Metrolinx could be an example of what I'm talking about. The lion's share of that cost is proposed to come from a 5% increase in gas taxes and a 1% increase in the sales tax, taking the HST up to 14%. We've recently heard the federal finance minister already draw the line on that one. That, as we know, was not part of the original deal to bring the HST to the province of Ontario.

People in my riding and, I would suggest, much of rural and northern Ontario are concerned that they will again be digging into their pockets to help feed this government's spending problem. I recall reading a tweet a year ago or so from an area columnist, a journalist, Monte Sonnenberg. He was talking about reaching into his pocket to grab some change and ending up shaking hands with Dalton McGuinty. That's an analogy of what we have been seeing for the last 10 years, and I suggest it's something we're going to see over the 20 years of this Metrolinx project alone.

I don't think I've run into anybody in my riding of Haldimand–Norfolk who rides the subway or rides the rocket. For years, locally, we've been paying provincial gas taxes to fund public transit, but we haven't had any public transit in our riding. We get nothing back in return. I suggest that people in my riding are starting to figure this out. I'm suggesting that the Metrolinx tale could well read like a well-managed scam of the like I've been reading in my local paper. Much as our rural taxpayers have been sending their money to Toronto for nothing in return,, so, too, the unfortunate victims of email- and telephone-type scams agree to play along. There are roadblocks—they rationalize; they justify—which they requested for more taxes, additional fees, and eventually the sum gets larger and larger.

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Newspaper reports indicate that the victim in my riding was asked to send thousands of dollars to cover costs, with the promise that she would be reimbursed later. Each time, the amount needed was upped, and she complied until her fortune was cleaned out.

Speaker, it puts us in mind of this government's decade-long efforts, seemingly aimed at cleaning out our bank accounts with very little to show for it. I think of the health tax; eHealth, obviously; Ornge; Caledonia—that was a very expensive scandal; the gas plants. And, again, will it be Metrolinx? Will we read headlines 10 years from now, 20 years from now? You can do a lot that's

good; you can do a lot that's bad by subtracting \$50 billion from taxpayers in Ontario.

In the tradition of a regime that we see here that has yet to meet a new tax or a toll or a levy that it didn't like, this plan for the Metrolinx transit plan—the Big Move, as it has been dubbed—proposed billing to the tune of \$500 a year for each family. That bill quickly rises to \$1,000 a year if you are a family of five with two cars, so that comes out to about \$20,000 over the 20-year life of this proposal.

How can we legislators, in good conscience, support a substantive motion that would push along a budget, would support a government that's overspending and allowing free rein to move forward, for example, with this recently announced Metrolinx proposal?

Government representatives are suggesting a "regionalization" of the Metrolinx tax hikes: make the gas tax regional; make the sales tax addition regional; limit it to the greater Toronto and Hamilton area. In my view, that's either naive or they think the Ontario taxpayer is naive.

Last night I was speaking with people in my riding, while door-knocking, actually, in Canfield. It's in Haldimand county. They have a provincial highway right through the centre of the village. The highway now is something like four feet higher than the sidewalk and the front lawns of the houses. Obviously, there's flooding. We had a lot of rain just the other night. Here's an example of a village in my riding—they have a transit issue. It's a provincial highway. They have issues with flooding. Anyone I talked to last night really wasn't concerned about more money for a Toronto subway. They don't use the subway, but they use this provincial highway. This has to be fixed. It is being fixed. They're going to dig out that highway. They're going to lower that highway four feet. They've put in new hydro poles and telephone poles. It's odd; the poles are right in the centre of the sidewalk from one end of the village to the other, but I think that's going to get worked out in time as well. These are the kinds of things you come across when you're out door-knocking. It's a good way to really find out what's going on, of course, as we all know.

Again, a substantive motion—my concern is it's really just going to go further to enhance this addiction to spending that we're seeing now.

Like the victim in that local scam down our way—I obviously don't believe the Premier is motivated by greed. With respect to Metrolinx, I'm concerned she is going to get hooked on the story presented to her by her sense of wanting to do good, perhaps her feeling of wanting to not only leave a legacy, but to continue the legacy of her predecessor.

But when you look behind the scenes, the story doesn't seem to add up with Metrolinx. I really wonder who are the middlemen—who are the money mules—that we see in these Internet scams. The Premier herself may well be a victim in the end; perhaps she's being led to believe that she's engaging in legitimate work. Again, we have be ever, ever vigilant. We've got to help out on this.

I will say, I found this last night at the door: People in my area are skeptical. You really don't pull the wool over their eyes. They see many of these government plans, this budget, these cash calls, really for what they are. They see past the headlines. They understand that—going back to Metrolinx once again—government is demanding people—I'll make reference to Canfield, the village that I was in last night. They have no subways there, obviously; no streetcars. They have no choice but to drive. Asking people in that particular village and throughout my riding to fund transportation needs of their big-city cousins—that gives them reason to have concern.

I know that people down my way will say things like, "We'll believe the musings of money for rural roads and bridges when we see the promised two-cents-a-litre tax to be sent back to our two counties." Again, they know they haven't seen the money yet and they know that past behaviour is the best predictor of future behaviour. They are wary. They know the track record of broken promises from this government.

Everyone remembers the McGuinty health tax, the \$1.7-billion tax that "would be dedicated entirely to health." Ten years later, I think everyone realizes it was an income tax grab. It now comes in at \$3.4 billion a year, flows into general revenues, as you know, Speaker, and is allocated by this government to whatever catches this government's fancy.

So you can understand why people would be a little gun-shy of a proposal, a \$50-billion scheme that's been recently hatched, in part because so many people are having a tough time paying the bills. They pay enough in existing taxes for transit and are very concerned what percentage of those taxes are wasted. Again, I'm thinking of eHealth, of Ornge, Caledonia and the gas plants. Instead of a knee-jerk reaction to pick taxpayers' pockets, government should be seeking efficiencies within its own. Cut red tape. Cut the waste before thinking of tapping out taxpayers who are already tapped out.

I see in this government the opposite path that opens the door to future schemes. It's only been a month or two since the government was read in the House that we hear this call for a \$50-billion expenditure of more taxpayers' money. I take the opportunity—take a look at some of that old-school advice, the advice that comes out of so many of these Internet scams that so many of us are subjected to.

I go back to the Simcoe Reformer article, our local daily paper. Here's some advice if you were considering Metrolinx, for example, or any previous boondoggles and scandals, whether it be eHealth or the gas plant. It says, "Don't be afraid to come forward if you've been taken—or think you've been taken—in a scam...."

Here's some more advice from the local paper: "Embarrassment is a common feeling, but remember these are professionals who have carefully thought out and planned their frauds..."

Some more advice: "They gain your trust and then take advantage of you....

"They really ... know what buttons to push...."

Last bit of advice: Contact the Canadian Anti-Fraud Centre. And they go on to say, "Reporting frauds is important because it gives authorities a clearer picture of how widespread the problem is and where to put resources...."

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The local newspaper report indicates, "Sometimes it takes years for people to report it as victims continue to believe their rewards are still on their way to them." Again, whether I'm thinking of Metrolinx or the eHealth tax, in many ways many people down my way feel they kind of got taken for a ride.

I know I only have about a minute left, Speaker. Many opposition members have been speaking about their concern with respect to physiotherapists and the impact that this will have on seniors, particularly in long-term-care homes. There's concern—the impact this would have on people who are on disability. I have spoken in the House about concerns with what I feel are unnecessary layoffs, unnecessary program cuts to our children's aid societies, including my local children's aid society.

I've only got 19 seconds left, hardly enough time to talk about the ongoing US Steel lockout down at Nanticoke. We find that the government seems suffocated, the government seems stymied by this when there's no assistance available.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: I'm very pleased to stand and join this debate today. Just to recap, I'd like to share with the public watching today that the substantive motion we're talking about is also known as a programming motion. In this particular case today, it aims to facilitate a speedy passage of the budget bill through the House and committee. It also includes the establishment of a Financial Accountability Office.

Well, Mr. Speaker, there's just no way I can support this particular motion because the fact of the matter is, we need to stand here in front of you and in front of this government and talk about the issues of today that would be just escalated, if you will, if we let this budget pass in a hasty motion. That's why I'm pleased, as I said, to join the debate.

When we take a look at the body—this Liberal government—that's actually trying to get this motion passed, I can't help but, first and foremost, think of scandals. That's why we have to take our time here today and review everything that's gone on and make sure that not only our colleagues in the House but the public knows as well why this government can't be trusted.

First and foremost, for the last 10 years this government's MO has been scandal after scandal. For the last 10 years, how many times did we hear them say they would not raise taxes? Well, we had a health tax. We had eco taxes. We have HST. We have a trades tax, and now, for goodness' sakes, we're hearing about revenue tools—just another way to say, "No, we will not raise your revenue tools now." It's just a travesty that they're trying to play so many games with their intent to spend more

without any cause for concern about how to rein it in and control spending that has gotten so out of hand over the last 10 years.

I was very pleased that, over the last 10 months or so, our member from Simcoe has done a wonderful job representing the College of Trades and how the trades tax would be so detrimental in rural Ontario, and throughout this province actually. It's one example of a tax that is just going to add an extra burden to families who are finding their pockets to be shallower and shallower, and we need to rein this in, as I said. But I'll come back to that in a moment.

We're talking about the scandals this government has imposed on taxpayers across this wonderful province of ours. We've had eHealth, Ornge, the Ontario lottery corporation, gas plants, failed green energy plans, harness racing, and who in the end has to take the brunt on the chin for all of these scandals? The Ontario taxpayers. I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, I stand before you today saying it has to stop. We need a change of team here. We need to have a group of people who stand up for what's right. That's why I'm so proud to stand on this opposition side of the House behind our leader, Tim Hudak, because he understands, he's listened and he's prepared to take those bold steps to get this province back on to a path to prosperity. I'm very proud to join him in that task, because the money that has been wasted on these scandals could have paid for so many other things.

Do you know what? They wouldn't have needed to raise the HST to pay for transit if they had not been facing scandal after scandal. Again, they continue to, over and over again, ask the taxpayer to dig deeper. Guess what? There's just no way you can spend your way back to prosperity, and that's why we need to have this debate. We need to talk about the tough issues. We need to talk about how this government has spent its way out of ideas, and that there really is need for change.

That is what the Ontario taxpayer is wanting, because when we take a look at the record of this Ontario government, it's dismal. Eleven billion dollars each year is being poured into servicing debt, debt that we simply cannot afford. That's \$11 billion to pay, simply on interest. I'm going to come back to this, because I spent this past Friday talking to a civics class, a grade 10 class in Huron county, and they absolutely get it. But I'll come back to that—

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I'm going to ask the Minister of Community and Social Services to come to order.

Hon. Ted McMeekin: I will, sir. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): And I apologize for interrupting. I return to the member for Huron-Bruce.

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: Thank you, Speaker.

Do you know that next year at this time, we're going to have \$24 billion more added to public debt? This deficit is going to go up \$2 billion next year. Think about what we could spend that money on and what we could

invest in terms of economic development, both in urban and rural Ontario. How many hospitals are not being built or renovated because of all these scandals and total disregard? I think of broken government promises, going back to 2011, for a Wingham hospital and a hospital in Kincardine, and I'd be remiss if I didn't note the hospital in Markdale, who have had the money in the bank, waiting for years, for a new hospital. They deserve their new hospital, and they're just not getting it, because the government is more intent on spending their way to keeping themselves in power. Once and for all, it really has to stop.

But let's talk about what else all this money being wasted on interest could go towards. What about all of the schools that have been closed in rural Ontario? I really feel that this government has no idea about true economic development. They've totally missed the point, and they've forgotten the fact that schools are a pillar and an economic driver in all communities throughout this province. Think about it: When a community, a small village, loses its school and students get bused into a larger centre, think about where the parents are going to do their shopping. Think about where the parents are going to pick up the gas. Think about the time spent on school buses that will keep young people away from jobs. You know, Speaker, this government says they have a program to get youth back to work, but they just don't get it, and that's why we need time to debate.

I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, when I rode the school bus in high school, I was on the bus for 45 minutes. It was tough to get a job after school because of that length of time, and now they're imposing that on more and more students throughout this province. It just doesn't make sense at all—and that was 45 minutes one way, I might add.

Again, when we talk about the interest that's being accrued and all the money that's being wasted because of the reckless spending of this government, there's so much more that we're doing without. What about affordable housing units? How many of those could we have built? And what about the fact that this government can't find any money, so what did they do instead? They're cutting physiotherapy for seniors.

The member for Wellington-Halton Hills has been a great advocate, saying how this is all wrong. The support that he's been getting from a variety of communities—my communities in Huron-Bruce are celebrating how he stood up for their rights—is staggering, and it's felt that way across the province.

I've had protests in front of my office for the last two weeks because of the cuts to physiotherapy. I've had meetings, particularly with the leadership at Braemar, from Wingham, Ontario, and guess what? They're worried about these cuts, because this government, the urban-based government that perhaps doesn't get life in rural Ontario—they don't get it that if a senior is in a retirement home, they may not have the means or the family support to find their way downtown for their physiotherapy appointment. That is a travesty, because

guess what? Those seniors are going to start going without, and then guess what happens: The fall rates are going to increase. That was a huge concern of the Braemar leadership team I met with.

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They see that cutting physiotherapy is actually going to have a very negative impact on the health of our seniors, and because of that, it's ultimately going to add to health care costs across this province. Yet again, another knee-jerk initiative to save a few dollars here and there, but ultimately, if they had thought it out they would have had a business plan that showed and pencilled that the net result would be negative and therefore they should not have done it. But that's what this government is all about: knee-jerk reactions, quick ideas, ill-conceived ideas that ultimately continue to throw this province further back into the status of a have-not jurisdiction. And that is so sad and so unacceptable.

Again, let's talk about all this money that's being wasted on interest. That \$11 billion could have been more money for social services in our communities. People I talk to in some cases are finding it really difficult to afford basic household expenses. And do you know what is really, really rich in this whole situation? Just a week or more ago, the former Minister of Finance, Dwight Duncan, even said this is a terrible budget. How ironic is that?

People are warning us about potential downgrades. What will that further explode? Interest rates. It's a spiral that has to stop, Mr. Speaker, and the only way to stop this is to change the team, change the perspective, have a focus on our economy and have a focus on paths that bring us back to prosperity. There's only one team in this House that can do it, and we all know who leads that team: Tim Hudak. And we are so proud, as the PC caucus, to stand behind him.

I heard the NDP mentioned, and I'd be remiss if, in my minutes here in the House during this debate, I didn't bring the NDP into this conversation. It is a travesty that they have essentially sold themselves out. They've rented themselves out so this Liberal government could have a majority to push through their ill-conceived, poorly timed ideas through this budget that we really can't afford.

You know, Mr. Speaker, I thought it was horrible last week that the NDP actually had the audacity to be celebrating with cake that they're helping this Liberal government continue to spend, when people in my home area are struggling with their energy bills, struggling to make ends meet. How can the NDP do that in good conscience? I just think they're totally off the block. No wonder the NDP seemingly has a split caucus.

I would be embarrassed by some of the priorities and initiatives happening out of that caucus today. Especially, it would be embarrassing to be celebrating with cake a budget where two out of three ministries are increasing their spending when more than half a million people are out of work in Ontario.

It just goes to show, as I said, that the Liberal government will do anything to cling to power, and in this case,

they agreed, over and above the spending that was already embedded in this poor budget that Dwight Duncan really does not like, to spend \$1 billion more to buy NDP support. That is just absolutely horrible.

It's pretty interesting to watch the antics that go on in this House. In the morning, when the cameras are rolling, the NDP is slamming the Liberal government for their scandals associated with the gas plants. On the flip side, in the afternoon, when the cameras aren't rolling, they're behind doors cooking up deals to prop up this scandal-plagued government.

You know, if I was a person who carried an orange membership card, I'd be ripping it up, because you don't want a party that talks out of both sides of its mouth. You want a party that stands tall; you want a party that's not afraid to take firm, tough decisions because we have to be focused on righting this ship.

When we think about it a little bit more, everybody on the left side of this House, this coalition government that has formed before our eyes, needs to be told time and time again that we need to live within our means. This particular budget we're debating today means nothing more than spending, spending, spending. There, no jobs. I would be ashamed to prop up this budget as a result.

When we talk about spending, I had the opportunity, this past Friday, to spend time with a grade 10 civics class at St. Anne's high school in Clinton, a wonderful school. Their students and teachers are very, very bright. When we started talking about debt, I thought it was really interesting, because grade 10 students get it. So I just don't understand why the third party and our Liberal government don't get it. They understand that when their wallet is empty, they have to stop spending.

We talked about the example whereby when you're out of money, sometimes what happens? You put expenditures on a credit card. Then we talked about the interest that accrues on credit card expenditures, and the kids in that grade 10 St. Anne's class get it. That's a tribute to Mr. Thompson's efforts in that class. I have to tell you, they think it's absolutely wrong that we are accruing so much interest on spending that we can't afford.

Thinking back to May 2, when the Liberal government introduced this particular budget, I was watching CTV News at 6 o'clock. They had a little ticker going, and that ticker was showing how much interest was accruing on the debt in that one news hour. It was staggering, and I applaud CTV News for doing this, because it was a very effective visual, and real—very, very real. By the end of that news hour, the interest accrued on Ontario's debt was \$1.045 million. Do the math. That's over \$1 billion a year, as I spoke about earlier. We're poised to possibly be paying over \$2 billion in the very near future if we keep going on the path that we're on. We just can't afford it.

Grade 10 kids know it. They don't want us to be mortgaging their future. They want us to rein in spending. They want us to get this path right so that their future is bright. That's the only type of programming this gov-

ernment should be focused on in terms of youth development and jobs. They need to be thinking about what it takes to get our young people back to work. spending like a Mad Hatter is not the type of focus we should be having.

When we talk about spending recklessly and introducing programming recklessly and knee-jerk reactions, I can't help but think about energy and the energy plan that has been devised by this Liberal government over the last 10 years in Ontario.

To cut to the chase, I met with a manufacturing company called Bogdon and Gross in Walkerton. They're a century-old furniture manufacturer—great history, great products, great employees and great commitment to the future. But their future has to include affordable energy. Speaker, they told me that they have to see a government in Ontario that gets it. They need to see a government in Ontario that uses energy policy side by side with an economic policy. Energy no longer can be afforded in this province to be seen as a social policy.

In terms of economics, it was fascinating. Bogdon and Gross has new owners over the last five years. They have tracked their operating costs very closely, and in five years, guess what? Electricity rates have been reasonably consistent. The cost of distribution in their area has been consistent as well. What has caused their price of electricity to double in five years? It's a category that's painted green in their graphs, called "Global adjustment, debt retirement and taxes."

They're just one out of so many manufacturers in Ontario that are saying that if this doesn't get reined in, it's going to get really, really tough. For some manufacturers in this province, it has gotten behind the point of no return. And guess what? They've relocated south of the border, and they've taken the jobs with them. They've taken family and friends from Ontario with them as well. It's just not right.

Let's talk about energy for a second or two a little bit more in depth, specifically with regard to renewables. There's so much smoke and mirrors that cause me to be embarrassed by this provincial government. Just this past week, on Thursday, the Minister of Energy introduced new changes. They were cancelling FIT on a go-forward basis. They talked about giving municipalities more say.

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There was a cut line in the London Free Press that said, "Communities spoke, mayors spoke, and we listened." Well, guess what? On constituency week, I went back to work in my riding; I went back home and reached out to the 14 municipalities that work really, really hard on behalf of the folks who live in Huron-Bruce. Not one of those 14 municipalities had been contacted by this ministry before they introduced their changes. How ridiculous is this government that they don't even reach out to major stakeholders?

I just have to revisit the fact that in Huron-Bruce, if everything stays the same, they're going to be inundated by hundreds and hundreds—upwards of a thousand more turbines. The announcement on Thursday has no bearing

on what my riding is going to face in the future. We can't afford it. We can't afford the subsidies paid out to wind; we can't afford the subsidies paid out to solar. Because, guess what? As I said before, people are finding it tougher and tougher every day to hold their head up and make a good, solid living with a little bit of savings at the end of the day for their future.

That's what this budget motion comes down to. We have to debate this; we have to make sure the good taxpayers of Ontario know that this government is out of steam. They're venting steam for nuclear; they're spilling water. Well, guess what? They've spilled their goodwill across this province; they've run out of time, and we need change, because this budget does nothing to rein in spending and it does nothing to restore the confidence of people to invest in this province. That's what we need. That's how we have to look forward and get back on a path to prosperity. We need to, again, have a good fiscal handle on our situation so that ultimately we're attracting jobs and we're attracting investment so we have a future for our young people.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Mr. Victor Fedeli: I too want to take my 20 minutes to talk about the bill today. You know, the budget here does not spend a lot of time talking about northern Ontario. It certainly doesn't offer anything new for northern Ontario—a repeat of older programs, a rehash. So perhaps today I'll spend some time talking a little bit about the part of Ontario that I live in and the part of Ontario that can contribute so much more to the province of Ontario.

The Ontario that I grew up in certainly would have been known as the engine of Confederation. It was a proud province that I grew up in. If Ontario was the engine of Confederation, then northern Ontario was the fuel for that engine; it was the lumber, it was the minerals. It also had the minds that were used in crafting northern Ontario—engineering minds, accounting minds, legal minds, all of these components that produced the products that helped build the rest of Ontario.

Sadly today we see an Ontario—the part that I live in, my own community of North Bay, has 11.3% unemployment. We have 60 mills that are closed in northern Ontario, predominantly due to the high cost of power. We have fallen from number 1—the number 1 mining jurisdiction in the world when this government took over; today we have fallen to 13th. This is not the Ontario that I want to see for our families. This is a shell of its former self.

So our party has put together a series of ideas, paths to prosperity—a dozen of them. I want to talk a little bit about some of the content of those paths to prosperity in the Ontario that can and will come again. I know a couple of the speakers have spoken earlier about, "Hang on, Ontario; we're coming back." When our leader, Tim Hudak, is elected Premier, you're going to see an Ontario that is coming back. I look forward to that day.

Recently our leader, Tim Hudak, was in northern Ontario, where he has spent a tremendous amount of

time, and he talked about some of the opportunities and presented our vision for northern Ontario in a brochure. It was simply called Our Northern Vision. Let me tell you a little bit about it, Speaker.

One of the main components of our vision is the Ring of Fire. I know we've heard a lot of talk about it. We've been here more than a year and a half now, but sadly, all we've heard so far is a lot of talk and not a lot of action. We're seeing, again, a government without ideas, without any concept of how to actually kick it over the goalpost, run it over the line. We're seeing talk and no ideas.

Let me talk a little bit about what we call the opportunity of the century.

I want to say that our leader, Tim Hudak, has been to the Ring of Fire. He has actually been in the base camp.

Almost a year and a half ago, I was at a Ring of Fire seminar in North Bay, my hometown. The Ring of Fire Secretariat stood up and was giving a speech about the Ring of Fire. She had been employed by the province of Ontario as the key person, the go-to person for the Ring of Fire—the Ring of Fire Secretariat, the person at the top of the pile. She had been employed for 18 months. She gave an interesting speech about what could happen. This was a while ago now. I went to her and I was talking about either my first or second or third trip there—I can't recall—and I said to her, "Coming over with the helicopter, as soon as we got to the base camp and I saw those blue-and-white tents, a big smile came over my face because I immediately recognized that those tents were made in my riding. They were made by a company in Rutherford called Canadian Can-Tex. They make canvas products. I thought, 'Wow, this is what we're talking about. This is only the beginning of the opportunity.'"

As the helicopter rounded and it began to set and I saw these triangle mounds of drill rods—another smile. I felt so good. In Nipissing, my riding, North Bay has 12 companies and Powassan has one that make those drill rods, that ship those drill rods to the Ring of Fire. It's just a fascinating place.

I was so excited with that, and I said to her, "What was the thing that got you the most excited the second you saw that?"

She said to me, "I've never been there."

My jaw dropped. The Ring of Fire Secretariat, the key person who was going to coordinate the activities of the Ring of Fire, had never set foot in the camp at the Ring of Fire.

Our leader, Tim Hudak, has said that we will have a comprehensive plan of action—no more talk. Let's get some action. Let's consult with the mining firms. Is it going to be a rotor or is it going to be a rail? What do you need? We'll be at the table with our share of infrastructure. He has made that commitment.

The first step has to be to talk to the First Nations communities, as we have. We need to understand their needs and their wants. We also need to understand the conditions that they are living in today and whether they want these changes made. That needs to be a consultative

process with the First Nations. They need to be in the game all along the way.

I know that our leader has said that he will take a provincial cabinet minister, one of his ministers, and make that person, whoever he or she is, the key point person for the Ring of Fire, to make sure that we can see the end of the talk and the beginning of the action.

It is an exciting opportunity for every community in Ontario—not just for communities in the north, but for men and women who want to work in an exciting sector. It's going to provide a tremendous amount of jobs.

If you dare to dream a little bit, think of the components of stainless steel, Speaker: ore, nickel and chromite. Those are the three components that are needed to manufacture stainless steel. In Ontario today, we mine a lot of ore, and we certainly mine a lot of nickel. And once we get through the talking and get into action in the Ring of Fire, we will mine chromite. Now we have all the components for stainless steel. It's something that we need to look at. We need to understand the value added that can be hopefully in northern Ontario, but at least in Ontario.

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This is the kind of vision that our party and our leader, Tim Hudak, are bringing to Ontario. We're also looking at other guidelines in the mining sector—again, we hear lots of talk and no action. Our party will make a share of the mining tax available to the First Nations communities and to the local communities.

I think about our friends in Sudbury—always a good example. I know that when I served as mayor, we would sit with the mayor in Sudbury and the other mayors throughout the north. It was called NOLUM, Northern Ontario Large Urban Mayors. The five of us met monthly, and we developed plans. We would come and we would try to get these ideas put forward. They were great ideas—sharing the revenue. The mayor of Sudbury was always quick to say, "You know, the mill is over here and the mine is over here, and the trucks barrel up and down the streets, tearing up the streets. The city has to pay for all the repairs, and the province gets all the money without having to pay for any of those." It was always an interesting debate. Our party has looked at that, and we have agreed with those northern mayors that yes, there is revenue that should be shared. We have agreed with the First Nations: Yes, there is revenue from mining that we should be sharing.

The same can be said for forestry, that there is an opportunity to discuss the forest tenure system that has failed in Ontario. It's not just mining that's suffering today; it's forestry as well. Our party will commit to 26 million cubic metres per year of lumber that will be harvested, and this will be very, very good news to the forestry communities throughout northern Ontario. Again, when we can afford it, the stumpage fees from the forestry sector, like the mining fees, will be shared with the First Nations and with the local communities, the municipalities who need that revenue so much, whose streets are being torn up by the mining and forestry vehicles and who are not earning any of that revenue.

In addition, we look at our plan for northern Ontario, and we believe that Ontario Northland should be treated as the economic engine—the infrastructure—for the rest of northern Ontario. Ontario Northland needs to be treated as an economic development tool, not a plaything that we've seen in this province.

Actually, just last Friday, in North Bay, I uncovered and presented to the waiting media the transition funding requirements. You know, this government announced the sale of Ontario Northland with no consultation whatsoever with stakeholders, with their employees. They just stood up one day and announced, "We're selling it off. Goodbye." They said it was going to be sold to save \$265 million a year. The document that I uncovered, a Liberal cabinet document that we got through the gas plant scandal hearings—oops, we're not going to save \$265 million. It's actually going to cost the government \$790 million to sell Ontario Northland.

I've said earlier, and I'll say it again, to the Premier: End the charade now. You got caught. Your own documents tell us that you're not going to sell it anymore. Will you put the families—the 1,000 families of Ontario Northland—put their minds at ease and end this misery that you've put them under for more than a year now? You're not going to sell it anymore. It's going to cost you \$790 million; your own document shows that. So quit the game, quit fooling around and get down to the point. Do what we've asked of you right from the beginning.

We brought great solutions to this Liberal problem right from the beginning. We said, "You need to have a strategic asset review. Review all of the assets, and let's find out what we need to make each of these things work." Instead, they just kept going ahead with the sale. They never did sell anything because they now realize the 14-year severance requirements for Ontario Northland employees and seven-year severance requirements for Ontera employees—they finally figured out what we told them right from day one: "You're not going to save any money. It's going to cost you money." We told them how much it was going to cost, but now, for the first time and the only time, we have written proof, the only written proof here, that the Liberals know themselves it's going to cost this money. So we asked them to end the charade and start treating Ontario Northland like the economic development tool it should be.

Speaker, I talk a lot about the time that I had the privilege of serving as mayor in the city of North Bay. One thing that confused me more than anything was the lack of attention to the north when it came to decisions. These decisions that were Toronto-centric decisions were made here for Toronto problems, but the solutions spilled over to cause problems in northern Ontario. I've used this example before, but I'm going to use it again because it does reflect the terrible situation when you don't shine a northern lens on problems: We built a phenomenal industrial park in my hometown. It's about a \$40-million industrial park: sewer, water, fire hydrants, utility poles, high-speed Internet, paved streets, a full checkerboard of streets bringing business in. Northern Ontario is built on

two things, Speaker. I'll call it swamp or rocks. That's what we're built on; let's face it. "Wetlands" is the more proper word, but when we look at it driving through there, we know what it is. It's a wetland and rock. Both, to me, are very beautiful and both very necessary.

When you walk through the concrete jungle that is Toronto, you don't see a lot of wetland. You don't see a lot of rock outcroppings either. They've all been blasted away or filled in, and off we go. At home, we have that, and we know how to manage these things. We know very well how to manage these things. Our industrial park is almost entirely wetland. What we do is, when we sell a piece of wetland to be filled in, we had the right under Ontario's laws to recreate another piece of wetland elsewhere of equal size. The conservation authority loved the plan, because when we built this equal-sized wetland somewhere else, we put boardwalks to it, signage. We made beautiful parks out of these areas. We've accumulated hundreds of acres, in my hometown of North Bay, of wetlands with signage, bird-watching sites—just absolutely gorgeous boardwalks that you can just spend your days in.

One day, Bill 26 came through, which oddly enough was called the Strong Communities Act, which did everything except strengthen our community. It said, "No longer can you take a wetland and fill it in and build an equally sized wetland, albeit better, anywhere else." That's gone now, because in Toronto we can't fill our wetlands in. I agree: You don't have enough to fill them in. We in the north understand the filter system that a wetland provides. I'm not sure they understand it here, but that is what it is. They took that away, and now we have a \$40-million industrial park with stop signs and fire hydrants, beautifully laid out, that you can no longer use. It's not for sale; the land is not for sale. Forty million dollars and you cannot build another building there because you need to take the wetland and replace it elsewhere. So that's gone now.

Now the city of North Bay is building a new industrial park up on the top of Airport Hill where the municipality happened to own about 1,600 or 1,700 acres, and off they go, spending millions to build another industrial park. I'm quite sure one day someone here in this Pink Palace will figure out why we can't use that one as well. I'm just being a little facetious today. But the whole point, Speaker, is that you've created a Toronto solution to a Toronto problem with the blinders on, and that solution has spilled over to create an unbelievable problem in every single municipality north of Steeles Avenue.

1750

It's not just the fact that there's lack of consultation. Had they only talked to us one minute before this thing passed, we would have been able to stay to them, "Great idea. It's very important in Toronto and southern Ontario that you do that. But at home, here's why it won't work, and here's what's so important."

When they took our fishing in Lake Nipissing and cut the amount of pickerel from four to two without consultation; when they announced the Algonquin land claim and

had one hour, after the announcement was made, of public consultation in the middle of March break—that was their idea of consultation; when we hear about the Big Move in Toronto and this plan to raise the GST and other revenue tools here in Toronto—I can guarantee you, Speaker, there's not a whole lot of people in northern Ontario that are eager to start paying 1% more of GST so that Toronto can have their traffic eased, when our transportation through Ontario Northland, whenever we need to spend a nickel on anything, that's a subsidy, but when Toronto needs to spend billions, that's an investment. Those are the kinds of things that we find offensive in northern Ontario. We're offended to hear those words.

While there was very little in that budget document that outlined anything at all for northern Ontario, and certainly nothing new for job creation, I would say to you that this last 20 minutes has been a good opportunity to understand a little bit of what's in the hearts and minds of the men and women in northern Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Mr. Jim McDonnell: I'm pleased to rise today to speak on this substantive motion and for my residents of Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry.

The government is now pulling out their old tricks of ramming through this very unaffordable budget, now with the help of their new partner in this coalition, the NDP farm team, as my colleague from Prince Edward—Hastings referred to it recently. This time allocation motion and the amendment by the member from Simcoe—Grey called upon us to debate the very fundamental principles that drive us as members of provincial Parliament.

It is the duty of this House to hold this Liberal government to account for its mismanagement. This is a duty that cannot be subordinate to the convenience of the government's desperate moves to survive, and to a third party so desperate to avoid an election, they are willing to forget their oft-stated principles and set them aside.

We've often heard how \$92 million is being tossed around by the Liberals and the NDP as the cost of an election. With this government borrowing at the rate of \$1.3 million per hour—yes, that's right, just \$1.3 million per hour—a potential election would cost less than three days' worth of the borrowing required to pay for the reckless spending problem that we see in this government.

I could support this budget and its obscene spending if the money was going to make a difference; if it was going to help turn things around; if it was going to bring back the 300,000 manufacturing jobs that have left Ontario since this government came to power; and if it created a fiscal environment that would attract new jobs and grow our economy. But sadly, we see none of this. We see 600,000 Ontarians who woke up this morning with no job to go to. We see no jobs plan in this budget, no plan to reduce the red tape facing businesses in the

province, and no plan to cut the costs facing them so that they could be competitive. We see policies that are geared to allow this government to cling to power by buying support from the other half of their coalition Liberal-NDP government.

My residents of Stormont, Dundas and South Glengarry are upset by this coalition and tell me every day that they've had enough. They are tired of the wasteful spending, tired of pet projects that gain the Liberal Party donations targeted at keeping them in power at the expense of the little guy, who is trying to make a living to put children through school and put money away for retirement and to just enjoy what they should: a good life in this province.

We've seen promise after promise, made during the campaign, broken shortly after the election. First it was the promise to freeze insurance rates. Speaker, I remember, at that time, just after the election, my insurance policy coming due and feeling that maybe there was something in this government's policy that would actually benefit me, and calling up my insurance company and getting the answer: "Fear not. We're just waiting for the legislation, and when we get it, we'll roll back and we'll give you a credit." Speaker, that never came about. First promise made; first promise broken.

Then it was the promise of not raising taxes. The former Premier even signed an agreement with the Canadian Taxpayers Federation, making a very public presentation to win support of the people of Ontario. But we quickly saw a strong trend from this government: promises made, promises broken, which they quickly did when they instituted the largest tax increase in Ontario's history, the new health tax.

Since that time, we have seen over 100 tax and fee increases by this Liberal government. What about the publicly signed agreement? They challenged the Canadian Taxpayers Federation in court to show that they're not legally required to follow through on any election promise, an ideal this government has wholeheartedly embraced, much to the detriment of the people of Ontario. But they see a government that has not learned from the basic budgeting rule that you can't continually spend more than you take in, year after year after year. Again, overspending for the greater good has some merit with the overall public if the overall public benefits. Sadly, this is not the case, and it continues not to be the case.

We have seen legislation that has driven up the cost of doing business, for the benefit of the Liberal government and now for their coalition partner, the NDP, with more than \$2 billion in promised concessions just to buy their support.

But I caution the NDP about this government's lack of moral character when it comes to keeping their promises. In fact, the leader of the third party, their leader, stood here in question period just a few weeks ago and questioned how they could be expected to trust the government when they hadn't come through with last year's budget promises. One would really wonder.

That brings to mind an old saying: Fool me once, and shame on you; fool me twice, and shame on me. Shame on this government and for its coalition partner, the NDP, for trying it once again. What makes you think that they've changed their stripes and that you can trust them now to keep a promise? My constituents of Stormont, Dundas and South Glengarry are telling me, "Shame on the third party for propping up this corrupt McGuinty-Wynne Liberal government."

It's time to change the direction that this province is taking, and the best way to do that is to change the government that's leading it.

Debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That would be a good place to conclude. It being 6 of the clock, this House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 9 a.m.

The House adjourned at 1759.

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Damerla, Dipika (LIB)	Mississauga East–Cooksville / Mississauga-Est–Cooksville	
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Fife, Catherine (NDP)	Kitchener–Waterloo	

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Harris, Michael (PC)	Kitchener-Conestoga	
Hillier, Randy (PC)	Lanark-Frontenac-Lennox and Addington	
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Hoskins, Hon. / L'hon. Eric (LIB)	St. Paul's	Minister of Economic Development, Trade and Employment / Ministre du Développement économique, du Commerce et de l'Emploi
Hudak, Tim (PC)	Niagara West-Glanbrook / Niagara-Ouest-Glanbrook	Leader, Official Opposition / Chef de l'opposition officielle Leader, Progressive Conservative Party of Ontario / Chef du Parti progressiste-conservateur de l'Ontario
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Jaczek, Helena (LIB)	Oak Ridges-Markham	
Jeffrey, Hon. / L'hon. Linda (LIB)	Brampton-Springdale	Chair of Cabinet / Présidente du Conseil des ministres Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing / Ministre des Affaires municipales et du Logement
Jones, Sylvia (PC)	Dufferin-Caledon	
Klees, Frank (PC)	Newmarket-Aurora	
Kwinter, Monte (LIB)	York Centre / York-Centre	
Leal, Hon. / L'hon. Jeff (LIB)	Peterborough	Minister of Rural Affairs / Ministre des Affaires rurales
Leone, Rob (PC)	Cambridge	
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MacLeod, Lisa (PC)	Nepean-Carleton	
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Mantha, Michael (NDP)	Algoma-Manitoulin	
Marchese, Rosario (NDP)	Trinity-Spadina	
Matthews, Hon. / L'hon. Deborah (LIB)	London North Centre / London-Centre-Nord	Deputy Premier / Vice-première ministre Minister of Health and Long-Term Care / Ministre de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée
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McNaughton, Monte (PC)	Lambton-Kent-Middlesex	
McNeely, Phil (LIB)	Ottawa-Orléans	
Meilleur, Hon. / L'hon. Madeleine (LIB)	Ottawa-Vanier	
Miller, Norm (PC)	Parry Sound-Muskoka	
Miller, Paul (NDP)	Hamilton East-Stoney Creek / Hamilton-Est-Stoney Creek	Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services / Ministre de la Sécurité communautaire et des Services correctionnels Minister Responsible for Francophone Affairs / Ministre déléguée aux Affaires francophones
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Milloy, Hon. / L'hon. John (LIB)	Kitchener Centre / Kitchener-Centre	Minister of Government Services / Ministre des Services gouvernementaux Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire du gouvernement

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Murray, Hon. / L'hon. Glen R. (LIB)	Toronto Centre / Toronto-Centre	Minister of Infrastructure / Ministre de l'Infrastructure Minister of Transportation / Ministre des Transports Minister of Labour / Ministre du Travail
Naqvi, Hon. / L'hon. Yasir (LIB)	Ottawa Centre / Ottawa-Centre	
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Nicholls, Rick (PC)	Chatham-Kent-Essex	
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Quellette, Jerry J. (PC)	Oshawa	
Pettapiece, Randy (PC)	Perth-Wellington	
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Prue, Michael (NDP)	Beaches-East York	
Qaadri, Shafiq (LIB)	Etobicoke North / Etobicoke-Nord	
Sandals, Hon. / L'hon. Liz (LIB)	Guelph	Minister of Education / Ministre de l'Éducation
Schein, Jonah (NDP)	Davenport	
Scott, Laurie (PC)	Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock	
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Singh, Jagmeet (NDP)	Bramalea-Gore-Malton	
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Tabuns, Peter (NDP)	Toronto-Danforth	
Takhar, Harinder S. (LIB)	Mississauga-Erindale	
Taylor, Monique (NDP)	Hamilton Mountain	
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Vanthof, John (NDP)	Timiskaming-Cochrane	
Walker, Bill (PC)	Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound	
Wilson, Jim (PC)	Simcoe-Grey	
Wong, Soo (LIB)	Scarborough-Agincourt	Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire de l'opposition officielle
Wynne, Hon. / L'hon. Kathleen O. (LIB)	Don Valley West / Don Valley-Ouest	Minister of Agriculture and Food / Ministre de l'Agriculture et de l'Alimentation Premier / Première ministre Leader, Government / Chef du gouvernement Leader, Liberal Party of Ontario / Chef du Parti libéral de l'Ontario
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**Legislative Assembly
of Ontario**

Second Session, 40th Parliament

**Assemblée législative
de l'Ontario**

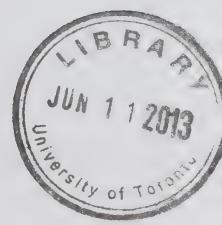
Deuxième session, 40^e législature

**Official Report
of Debates
(Hansard)**

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

Tuesday 4 June 2013

Mardi 4 juin 2013



**Speaker
Honourable Dave Levac**

**Président
L'honorable Dave Levac**

**Clerk
Deborah Deller**

**Greffière
Deborah Deller**

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Tuesday 4 June 2013

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Mardi 4 juin 2013

The House met at 0900.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Good morning. Please join me in prayer.

Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

ORDER OF BUSINESS

Resuming the debate adjourned on June 3, 2013, on the amendment to the amendment to the motion to apply a timetable to certain business of the House.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Further debate? The member for Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry.

Mr. Jim McDonell: Thank you, Speaker. I'll continue.

Let's look at the textbook cases of lack of oversight by this government on numerous files, like the \$2 billion in eHealth and the \$1 billion wasted on Ornge; they continually do what they can to block the people of Ontario from getting to the truth.

The Ornge file is particularly disturbing, as the minister repeatedly ignored warnings from the opposition that did not pass the smell test; warnings that were screaming of misappropriation and corruption. The minister's response: Trust me. I've checked out the concerns, and I'm comfortable with what's going on at the Ornge air ambulance agency.

What a boondoggle, as revealed by the Auditor General. He was able to identify, without the co-operation of Ornge, at least 12 affiliated for-profit corporations created with money from the people of Ontario and beyond his mandate to investigate, with many off the board of directors, including the CAO, on many of them.

It was only after the story broke in the Toronto Star that this minister cared to show any interest in the issue. It begs the question: How deeply did she check out the allegations, if at all, or was it just a ploy to get beyond the pending 2011 election?

Then there were the delay tactics and the refusal to establish the select committee to review the file to get to the bottom of the issue. Everything that could be done to block the opposition from getting the information that they legally and morally and rightfully are entitled to was done and continues to be done on that file today.

The stories continue, as we see once again that the government is desperately pulling out all the stops to see that the people of Ontario do not get to the truth of the now famous billion-dollar gas plant cancellations: the

delay tactics in committee; refusal to release documents ordered by the standing committee of this House, until under threat of contempt and with the minister facing potential incarceration; then to partially release heavily redacted documents whited out, clearly against the Speaker's orders; then more redacted documents and the prorogation; and now, Liberal Party staffers with severe amnesia and destroyed email accounts.

Speaker, the Wynne–McGuinty government has stretched its credibility well beyond believability. Now they are asking us to trust them with \$2 billion in extra taxes to fund Toronto transit. This government, with a huge, huge spending problem, does not consider the possibility of looking for a mere 2% in savings in their budget to fund this very important project that they have ignored for almost 10 years. They have refused our offer of a select committee to review government spending to find this small 2%—truly shameful.

With the government borrowing over \$1 million per hour, one can put in perspective the importance of ridding this province of the NDP–Liberal coalition government. In a democratic system, the people decide who governs them. Yes, there is a cost to elections, but it's well worth it. As we look around the world at different systems and the quality of life they afford their residents, I believe the cost of an election is worth well it; a cost that many Canadians have paid for with their lives to ensure that we have the right to elections and to choose our leaders through the election process.

People did not elect this leader. She was not the choice of the members of the current Liberal caucus. The people of my great riding of Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry have told me they can't afford not to have an election. They must get rid of this corrupt Liberal government.

The NDP has always howled about the importance of full debates in the House. Instead, today we have a motion to limit debate before us and the NDP is supporting it wholeheartedly.

We are elected to serve the interests of the people of Ontario and our constituents. If we look at this budget, the government is continuing its spending addiction to the tune of an extra \$3.6 billion this year. The interests of the people of Ontario lie in ensuring that our children can live in a province that is governed by its Legislature, rather than its creditors. We've had three credit downgrades on this government to date, and a warning has been issued in the last few months. Our former finance minister, Dwight Duncan, has recently called the situation "a ticking time bomb." How interesting it is that when somebody leaves the shadows of the Liberal Party, their perspective on life so quickly changes.

Already today, in 2013, each man, woman and child owns \$20,000 of debt that he or she has not chosen to accumulate. Dalton McGuinty spent like a drunken sailor on shore leave to buy the support of the Working Families Coalition, and the current Premier is following in his footsteps—regulations that are put in place without debate that appear solely for the benefit of the Liberal Party and their donators. There's nothing new in this government. It's just the same old spending and tricks. It's time to put the people of Ontario first and change the leadership of this province.

This time allocation motion and the amendment by the member from Simcoe—Grey call upon us to debate the very fundamental principles that drive the members of provincial Parliament. It is a duty of this House to hold the Liberal government to account for its mismanagement. This duty cannot be subordinate to the convenience of a government desperate to survive, or to a third party so desperate to avoid an election that they're willing to set aside their oft-stated principles.

We often hear the \$92-million figure tossed around by the NDP and the Liberals as the cost of an election. The government has cost Ontario \$1 billion at Ornge, \$2 billion at eHealth and close to \$1 billion in the cancellation of the gas plants. For all their holier-than-thou howling, the New Democrats have failed to grasp the essential truth: If you believe the government is corrupt, you must change the government.

Our amendment to the time allocation motion gives the assembly a chance to do for constituents what they have been demanding of me more and more frequently: throw this exhausted, wasteful and unaccountable Liberal government out of office and allow the people of Ontario to pass judgment upon the Liberal failures, the NDP sell-out and the only credible plan to bring Ontario back to its rightful place as an economic engine of Canada: the PC Paths to Prosperity.

There is no real strategy to get Ontario back to work—600,000 people woke up this morning without a job and 300,000 manufacturing jobs lost. Reams of regulations and red tape are blocking our entrepreneurs from doing what they do best: start or extend businesses, hire new people who will make wages—

Mr. Paul Miller: Yeah, eight bucks an hour.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Okay, member.

Mr. Jim McDonell: —pay taxes and help support the important services our government must provide.

The Wynne government's solution: hire more people to the already bloated public sector with no plan on where we get the money or how we pay their wages and benefits. Times are tough, and I have had a steady stream of people in my constituency office asking for help against the policies of the Wynne-McGuinty government, now with the firm support of their NDP farm team.

0910

Two weeks ago, a retired couple came in asking for help. They showed me their property bills and their hydro bills. They told me how they were tired of time-shifting their activities and how they had done everything they

could to try and reduce their hydro bills, up almost three times since this government came into power. They were getting desperate: fixed incomes, a very modest lifestyle, but they just couldn't make it work anymore. It's hard to tell this hard-working couple, who have lived within their means all their lives, never overextended themselves, looked after their affairs with fiscal responsibility for their children and grandchildren—it's embarrassing to tell them that this very high-priced government did not do the same.

The Green Energy Act was designed for short-term public opinion wins, but was not good for the province—no evaluation of the economic impact on jobs and the economy. Now we waste billions—and I said “billions”—each year to pay many times the market price for power that we don't need, forcing us to spill power over our dams, shut down the nuclear plants—Bruce 10 times last summer, I believe—still surplus power we must get rid of; pay our neighbours, our competitors, to take it off our hands, and it makes no sense, absolutely none.

Our once major competitive advantage is gone in just 10 years of this Liberal government. I listened to one of our suppliers demanding that we intervene. We asked him if he had talked to the government. His answer was, “Of course we have.” We said, “What was their response?” I'll quote; he says, “Nothing. Nothing. They're just paralyzed. They don't know what to do.” But you know, we can no longer do that. We can no longer pass the decisions off to the next government that will come along and have to clean up the mess. This is not responsible government. This is not the government that the people of Ontario deserve.

The government did not make the tough decisions that would have been in the best interests of the people of Ontario. Instead, they took the easy way out. They made decisions that would not stand the test of time, decisions that were good for them and their friends with donations. They used their majority to mask the issues from the people, but they failed to calculate one thing: What happens when you lose your majority. The 2012 fall by-election seems now to be no accident, a failed attempt to win that elusive majority so that they could again push the truth away from the people. As we saw and as they say, the rest is history. Now we see the mess they've created.

Speaker, there is more. Small businesses in my riding are asking for help. They talk of the TSSA and how it discriminates against Ontario businesses. Equipment all over North America is essentially blocked from installation in Ontario. Yes, there is a process, but one so onerous that it's just easier to set up business somewhere else. They are starting to fight back, but they are tired of the intimidation and the unfair labour laws. As one desperate business told me, “We need you to tell the people how bad it is, for if we speak out we get targeted. They would rather see us out of business than to have us tell our story.”

It's time for a change. It's time to put a government in place that will do the right things, and to make the tough

decisions to put Ontario back on track—the economic engine of Canada, what it was when the Dalton McGuinty government took over.

There are many cases of people coming into our constit offices who just can't do it anymore. We have businesses that come in. We talked about them being afraid to speak out. I had a meeting last summer; we had 10, 15 businesses. They walked out the back door because the press was out front and they didn't want their pictures in the paper. They were afraid to be seen. Under these current laws they get targeted—they get certified without a majority of their employees having a say.

Whoever heard—we had one company in our riding—40 people working for the company, two people on a holiday but working; they certified the company. It took them almost \$1 million to get out of it—because he had 38 employees; they were furious with what happened—and four years. This is the province of Ontario that has lived by democratic principles all our lives. These are regulations put in by this Liberal government that this House has never seen, done through the back door, and now we're seeing the results. But there's one thing for sure: These regulations have garnered huge donations, but unfortunately—with the power we have in committees in a minority government, we're starting to see some of these things and we're starting to act. It's time to act and change the leadership of this province.

Speaker, I think that there are many more stories like that around the Legislature, and I think it's time that we heard some of them as well.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further debate?

Mr. Rosario Marchese: I'm happy to speak to the motion and the amendments the Tories have made.

We agree with the Conservative Party on quite a number of issues. The member from Stormont-Dundas-South Glengarry mentioned them, and we have attacked the Liberal Party with the same vigour. When we talk about the scandals—

Interjection.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: I beg your pardon?

Interjection.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: I'm going to speak to that.

The problems, the scandals around eHealth have been big and have caused much consternation in Ontario. The scandals around Ornge have caused a great deal of anger against the Liberal Party, and the scandals around the gas plants have been worse. When people think about the \$600 million that we are aware of, so far, wasted on the gas plants on the basis of the government saying, "We are going to build those gas plants there no matter what and we will fight NIMBYism no matter what," until they're faced with a possible election and they believe that they're about to lose three or four seats. Then, all of a sudden, those principles around, "We will build those gas plants no matter what, no matter what NIMBYism may exist in those communities," just were thrown out the window. Then the Liberal, who wanted to have it both ways, would say, "Well, you, the Tories, wanted it

eliminated as well, and you, NDP, wanted it gone as well," trying to hide the fact that they were going to build those gas plants no matter what. They knew there were children and families surrounding those gas plants when they decided to put them there. And when they finally decided to change their minds, the ex-Premier and the current government says, "Well, we made a mistake. There were communities there. There were kiddies there," as if they didn't know that in advance.

New Democrats have attacked this government for the mistakes they have made and the blunders and the scandals around all of these things with vigour, and they deserve the criticism and the attacks that many Ontarians have levied against them. How do we deal with—

Ms. Sylvia Jones: You thank them by propping them up—

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Ah, Sylvia, Sylvia. I will get to that.

Here are the two possible responses: One is the Tory response: "Let's get them all out; let's get these Liberals out. We've lost confidence in them." I understand; I understand the argument. It's plausible. It's cogent, even. The problem around that is that there are a whole lot of people in Ontario saying, "I'm not sure that's the answer." A whole lot of people are saying, "Make government work." A whole lot of people want opposition parties and governments to work for them. It's not about political parties and their interests; it's about making sure governments work no matter what. In spite of the scandals, still many of them out there want governments to work together to get some results that better their lives, and I happen to be in that camp.

There is a small group of Ontarians out there saying, "Throw the bums out today." The question is, who do you want in their place? Which brings me to the Conservative Party solutions. What are those solutions? Well, they would freeze wages in perpetuity on all civil servants because they deserve for their wages to be cut and frozen forever. That is the solution of the Conservative Party. I understand that, because they're picking up on a lot of sentiment out there that says, "Civil servants are absolutely not good. Civil servants don't work. They provide no service to anyone, and freezing their salaries or even cutting them is a good thing." They pick up on that. They pick up on that populist, anti-civil servant sentiment. And I understand it; I just don't agree with them. I just don't agree with that sentiment.

0920

They are picking up on anti-union rhetoric that's out there, and so they promote anti-union, anti-worker kind of stuff. They promote it. Why? Because within their Conservative base, there's a whole lot of people who hate whatever accomplishments unions have given to working men and women.

It's a beautiful dilemma we face—not dilemma. It's an interesting thing. I've known a great deal of non-unionized workers who love the fact that unionized workers go out and fight it out and get attacked for organizing themselves so that they can get better benefits and wages—

better pensions even, God bless—and those who are non-unionized get the direct benefit of those who go out and fight it out. Those who get the blame for fighting for better benefits are out there being attacked by, mainly, Conservative-type politicians. I remind you that those who are not part of the union get the same benefits, the same wage increases, that unionized staff get without doing a thing. What a beautiful thing it is to allow the unionized workers to go out and fight it out while they get the same benefit of the dirty work that the others guys do. I always found that ironic, always ironic.

You don't see the non-unionized workers going out organizing with union workers, you don't see that, but they love the concurrent consequential benefits they get from those who wage a fight for better wages and better benefits. It's funny how that works.

So do we attack wages? That's what the Conservatives want to do. Do we attack unions? That's what the Conservatives want to do. Do we attack pensions? That's what the Conservatives want to do, because they say we can't afford pensions anymore.

What else do they promote? What else have they promoted for the last 20 years? Cutting corporate taxes as the way to create jobs in this province and in this country. That has been their motto; that has been their modus operandi. That has been their ideological insight into how you make the economy work. What evidence do they have for job creation by cutting corporate taxes? There's absolutely none except that ideological fervor to cut corporate taxes. Under the Tories, we lost—in eight and a half years of their governance—\$13.4 billion, gone forever. If you elect another Conservative government, God forbid, they would cut corporate taxes some more. Governments are broke. Governments have a deficit, and the Tories would cut corporate taxes some more.

Interjection: Hear, hear.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: The “hear, hear” party on cutting corporate taxes, and they actually believe it. They smile when they say it. They are true believers in the market and in the corporate sector and in their belief that somehow, magically, if you cut their taxes, the jobs will be created. It's not true. The jobs have not been created in the way that they have envisioned.

I remember Mulroney in the old days saying, “When you have a free trade agreement, prosperity will follow.” Do you remember his voice? He had such a lovely, honeyed voice. “Prosperity will follow, and jobs will follow.” Jobs didn't follow nothing; jobs didn't follow anywhere. I didn't see jobs coming there from that free trade agreement. I didn't see any of that. But the Tories, in their blind pursuit of a North American free trade agreement and globalized trade agreement, they said, “We do this, and the jobs will follow.” Jobs followed nothing. That prosperity never came; the jobs never came.

Do I believe that kind of stuff, that kind of ideology? Absolutely not, but that's what we have in store for you Ontarians should you decide to get rid of the Liberals and put the Conservatives in their place. God bless, indeed.

That, to me, is the scariest thing that one could imagine, having witnessed eight and a half long years of that Mike Harris regime. That's something that I just can't imagine.

But in the same way that Mulroney said with the free trade agreement that prosperity will come and jobs will come, the Liberals said, “If we impose an HST”—remember that? Tories remember that—“600,000 jobs will be created.” That was the Liberal mantra of the HST. So I have to remind them of Mulroney, and I want to remind the Tories of the Liberals' promise of having an HST and the creation of 600,000 jobs.

Do any of the Tories, or those who are here in the Legislature, remember seeing those 600,000 jobs come as a result of the HST imposition on the public? I haven't seen a thing. Maybe Liberals have seen it, but I suspect Tories will say, “We didn't see them.” Is that correct?

Mr. Jeff Yurek: We're talking about Bob Rae over here.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Yes, I know; I know. I'm talking about both of you. I love to talk about Liberals and Tories as well, just because I'm an equal opportunity kind of person.

So you've got to take all this stuff with a grain of salt. The jobs didn't come with the HST.

But you remember Dwight Duncan—somebody mentioned Dwight Duncan in their speech; the member from Stormont-Dundas-South Glengarry mentioned him. He's now a fine Liberal-Tory out in some firm, making good pecunia as a result of his consulting abilities.

The Conservatives have it right: Now that he's out there, he's quite happy to attack Liberals in terms of what direction they're going in. But I remember Dwight Duncan at the time saying, “The jobs will follow.”

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: He's allowed to have opinions.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Oh, sure he is. He's allowed to have opinions indeed, just for a second.

Here's the point: The reason why we have supported this government is because we were able to get some changes that make life for Ontarians a whole lot better. We know that the unemployment in Canada is pretty bad. About 1.3 million Canadians don't have jobs. That's a huge number. Another million are underemployed or have given up looking for work, and the unemployment rate for the young is twice the national average. Things are tough; things are bad.

When we think about how governments spend money, we have to worry about how they're doing that. This is why, in addition to—in addition to—making sure that we reduce the auto insurance rates, because they're the highest in the country, in addition to making sure that we protect seniors who are desperately looking for and need home care help, in addition to making sure that the young who are unemployed get the support they need for jobs, which is what we got out of this government—in addition to all these things, we also got a Financial Accountability Office that we believe is going to bring some rigour, some controls on governments that we have not seen in a long time.

So when we talk about the scandals around eHealth and around the gas plants and around Ornge, having a Financial Accountability Office that we have fought for, that Liberals have agreed to, is something that will bring responsibility back to governments, will bring greater accountability of governments to the people and might bring back some respect of the people toward politicians in governments.

This Financial Accountability Office is one of the most important things that we could have brought to this Legislature. It doesn't matter whether it's Liberals in power or Tories or New Democrats; we will all be bound by such an office in a way that will bring credibility, accountability and honesty back to government. This is a good thing. This is important for politicians and important for the people of Ontario.

So when the Tories say that the NDP have lost their principles, I don't know what they're talking about. I don't know what they're talking about. When the Tories say that the NDP have sold out, I don't know what they're talking about. We've got gains for the people of Ontario that are good for the people of Ontario, something we have fought for to get from the Liberals. The Tories have got absolutely nothing. They have absolutely got nothing from Liberals in terms of making sure that this budget is a better one for the people they're defending.

0930

The Conservatives are the new "no" Conservative Party. That is what they are: the new "no" Conservative Party. They fight everyone. They're absolutely negative. All they want to do is bring things down, bring governments down so they could get right back in where they were, because they miss being in government. I understand that. But for New Democrats, it's not about us. It's about making sure we get important changes that make their lives just a little bit better, and if we can do that this is a good thing.

I know that some Tories might say we have an Auditor General. But the Auditor General takes a retrospective look at what might have gone wrong. They do value-for-money audits, which is good, but it's retrospective. Our Financial Accountability Office looks forward. This is important. We have called for bigger powers for the Ombudsman to be able to have oversight over hospitals. The Liberal government has refused.

We support the work he does, he or she—at the moment it's a he, but in the past it was a she in that position as well. We support the work they do because they investigate individual and systemic problems, and he brings forth recommendations that make for better policies. What the Ombudsman does is important. But he responds to issues on the basis of complaints.

Our Financial Accountability Office would not just do value-for-money, would not just investigate, but would make sure that when governments are about to spend something we have an officer there to say, "You are making a mistake," or "You're about to be spending so much money. In spite of what you are saying, you are overspending on this," or underspending, even. He or she

would have the power to say, "Hold on," before you engage in some activity that is about to waste millions of dollars of Ontarians' money.

This is an important office we are establishing here. It's an office that would be independent of political parties, independent of ministers and independent of cabinet. This is an office where, if a member has a complaint or a committee wants something investigated, we have the power to do that. This is good. Unlike what we have at the present, where you ask for information that possibly has been hidden for years and it really is difficult to get at the root of the problem, our Financial Accountability Officer would be able to get that information in a very, very short little while and get to the root of the problem quickly. We want that. We need that.

And it's not just me as a New Democrat; it's me as a citizen. Citizens want the power to be able to hold governments accountable, and that's what this position does. We are absolutely proud of this accomplishment. We believe, as New Democrats, that this is an accomplishment for people. This isn't about political parties. This office would hurt New Democrats as much as it would hurt Liberals as much as it would hurt Conservatives if they do the wrong thing. We should be happy to support a motion that contains within it such an officer, such an ability that makes us all accountable.

Speaker, this motion takes us to a place where we have made gains for people. This is what we really want. This is what people want. Ultimately, the people will be able to hold government accountable when the election is held. If they don't like the party in power, they will throw them out. The opportunity to throw out a party is during an election. That day will come, and it will not take that long. I guarantee the Premier will take us into an election next year; that will bring us in two and a half years to an election and that, in my mind, is plenty of time to hold the government to account and judge them on the basis of what they did or did not do.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further debate? The member for Middlesex-Elgin-London.

Mr. Jeff Yurek: Thanks, Speaker. It can go in any order; it works either way.

I'm pleased to stand here and discuss this motion. I have to say, Madam Speaker, that I have some *déjà vu* here. I've only been an MPP for about a year and a half, and I feel like I'm watching a rerun again. We have the Liberal government here trying to stay in power and they're pandering to the NDP for support. Unfortunately, it's driving away what we should be talking about here in the Legislature and in Ontario. Ontario has a spending problem, plain and simple. We spend more than we bring in. What happens when we spend more than we bring in is that you have to borrow the difference to make up for that extra spending, and in any borrowing arrangement we have to pay interest on that debt.

I'll go to Jeffrey Simpson, a columnist for the *Globe and Mail*. He had an interesting quiz for his readers a few weeks ago. He asked, what will be the fastest-rising cost for the Ontario government in the next three years? Is it

health care? No. Is it education? No. Is it post-secondary education? No. Is it justice? No. Is it community services? No. The answer, of course, is plain and simple: It's our interest charges. The third-largest expense in this government's budget is interest charges, at \$10.6 billion. Interest charges are expected to rise by about \$4 billion by 2017.

Talking about the debt and interest charges may not seem like an exciting conversation. However, it has deep implications for the province of Ontario. That \$4 billion represents a 36% increase in interest charges. By 2017-18, Ontarians will see over \$14 billion of their money going to pay foreign bondholders. Just think of all the long-term-care beds we could buy, the schools we could renovate, the roads we could build and repair with \$14 billion. Sadly, that money will go towards foreign nations who hold our bonds, so they can invest in their own health care, their own schools and their own roads.

How did we get to the point where the third-largest expense in Ontario's budget is interest? It's pretty easy to figure out. Every household in this province knows that the more debt you have on your credit card, the more interest you pay. The only simple solution to this is to reduce your spending. Unfortunately, this government seems to have a compulsion to spend taxpayer money. Never once have they demonstrated restraint in the last 10 years. In fact, they have increased spending by \$48 billion since they took power. The McGuinty-Wynne Liberals, with their tax-and-spend ways, are the sole reason Ontario finds itself where it is today. We now have a debt for every man, woman and child equal to \$20,000. That means my nine-year-old daughter is on the hook for \$20,000 of this government's debt. Each and every one of these pages here today is on the hook for \$20,000 of debt because of the spending of this government.

Despite the knowledge that you know how much debt we're in, the government continues spending unabated. What's worse, in their desperation to maintain their power they have added \$1 billion in spending initiatives to get NDP support. This is the danger when you have two tax-and-spend parties trying to exert their influence. The real problem gets swept under the rug in favour of more spending. Mind you, throwing taxpayer money away to hold onto power is not a new theme to this government. We only need to look at the gas plant scandal, where the government threw away over \$585 million to save a few seats in the GTA.

The abuse of the tax dollars needs to stop. We need a new team, one that will actually rein in spending and reduce the debt burden, for the sake of our children and grandchildren. This budget shows me that the Liberals can't, and the third party's demands on spending shows me the NDP won't.

0940

I'd like to turn for a minute to the RBC to see what they had to say about this budget. The expert RBC economists have put together a helpful briefing note evaluating this government's budget. The report relies on some

economist talk, so I'll take the liberty and do some translating.

The first thing our friends at RBC felt the need to point out is that the budget "did not represent a departure from budgets of the past four years in terms of the general fiscal plan." In other words, we're stuck with the McGuinty brand of fiscal management, or lack thereof.

Whatever this government tries to say about how they are different from the tax-and-spend McGuinty team, the devil is in the details. The details are a 3% increase in spending this year, or \$3.6 billion more in total. While we're at it, we should note that spending last year increased by only 0.9%. So not only is this government not decreasing spending, it's not even reducing the rate at which spending grows. When you're speeding towards a cliff in a car, you hit the brakes. Unfortunately, this government has hit the accelerator.

The other interesting thing the RBC economists said of the Liberals' approach to this year's budget is that they've "left the back end of the plan—fiscal years 2016-17 and 2017-18—more 'aspirational' in nature." What exactly is meant by "aspirational"? Quite simply, it means the government is putting off the real spending restraint for another three years. That is, of course, if you believe they have the ability to do it at all. The problems in this province are not difficult to figure out, but they are hard to do. The Liberals continue to kick the can down the road and hope for the best, but we have to restrain spending today, not tell people that we'll get to it tomorrow if we feel like it.

In any case, this government can deliver platitudes about challenges Ontarians face and our need to work together to solve problems, but the fact remains that they don't even know what the problem is. Their budget proves it. Despite the fact that we've been telling them for the past year that spending is a problem, they continue to leave the floodgates open to fund inefficient programs and, of course, to cover scandalous blunders like Ornge, eHealth and the Mississauga and Oakville gas plants.

When I talk to my constituents, they are upset, and rightly so. Constituents of mine from all walks of life are making decisions every day to live within their means. They're paying down credit card debt, making mortgage payments and sacrificing nice-to-haves so they can meet their obligations. They don't understand why the government behaves differently. Why should the government continue to live beyond its means, particularly when it's on the taxpayer dime?

In my riding, the situation has been compounded by the exodus of jobs over the last few years: 6,300 in total, with another 300 that occurred at the end of May. Our Timken plant has closed. People are struggling to find work and as a result are tightening their belts, and yet the government continues to drive up our debt and drive business out of this province. That is the second major deficiency of this budget: It has no job plan.

Sure, the government will talk circles as it tries to explain what it has done for the economy and employment.

The bottom line is, our debt continues to go up, hydro rates are skyrocketing, excess bureaucracy hampers business, and our young tradespeople can't find apprenticeships. The budget does not address any one of these things.

I'd like to use an analogy that my colleague from Thornhill said when he talked about the government's role in job creation. It's actually an analogy he modified from Martin Regg Cohn's editorial piece. It goes like this: If you set the table properly, your guests will want to come to dinner. In order to set the table for the dinner that is job growth and economic prosperity, you need to address the issues I've highlighted earlier: balancing the budget and paying down the debt. It'll bolster one crucial factor at the foundation of the economy: confidence. It signals to potential investors that our government's house is in order and can provide all the things a government is expected to, like health care, education and infrastructure. It also increases the capacity of a government to offer tax breaks in the future, which factors largely into a company's decision to invest.

We've all seen in Greece what happens when you lose confidence. There's not an investor or a business who wants to take a risk and put their money there.

Another factor that drives business investment decisions is the cost of hydro. There is no one else responsible for skyrocketing hydro rates than the Liberal Party. Thanks to them, economist Ross McKittrick has calculated, Ontario's hydro rates will soon be the highest in North America. If you want to locate a factory somewhere, why would you do it in a province with prohibitive hydro rates?

The government also needs to realize that every piece of regulation they create is more time a business owner has to spend filling out paperwork than working on his or her business. Bureaucracy adds to the business's direct cost, but it also costs in terms of lost economic activity, a cost equal to \$11 billion, according to the CFIB.

Speaking of bureaucracy, this government refuses to acknowledge what a terrible idea the College of Trades is. The College of Trades has raised fees on small business owners in my riding, all to fund an \$87-million bureaucracy that remains committed to keeping our trades ratios as restrictive as possible.

It is really is a shame. I see too many of our young adults leaving Elgin county for Alberta because they can't get apprenticeship jobs here. The great irony is that at the same time we're also experiencing a skilled trade shortage, yet the government refuses to do the sensible thing, which is to reduce the apprenticeship ratios to 1 to 1, where they should be. The bottom line is that this government's budget neglects these issues. Going back to the analogy, they are refusing to set the table at all.

Madam Speaker, if you'll let me, I have a quick fable I'd like to discuss here, and I think it really talks about what's going on in this government.

Interjection: Aesop?

Mr. Jeff Yurek: I don't think it's Aesop. I don't have from who it is. I'll get it to the House, though.

One day, a scorpion looked around at the mountain where he lived and he decided that he wanted a change. So he set out on a journey through the forests and hills. He climbed over rocks and vines and kept going until he reached a river.

The river was wide and swift, and the scorpion stopped to reconsider its situation. He couldn't see all the way across. So he ran upriver and then checked downriver, all the while thinking that he might have to turn back.

Suddenly, he saw a frog sitting in the rushes on the bank of the stream on the other side of the river. He decided to ask the frog to help him get across the stream.

"Hello, Mr. Frog," cried the scorpion across the water. "Would you be so kind as to give me a ride on your back across the river?"

"Well, now, Mr. Scorpion. How do I know that if I try to help you, you won't try to kill me?" asked the frog hesitantly.

"Because," the scorpion replied, "if I try to kill you, then I would die too, for you see I cannot swim."

Now, this seemed to make sense to the frog. But he asked, "What about when I get close to the bank? You could still try to kill me and get back to the shore."

"That is true," agreed the scorpion, "but then I wouldn't be able to get to the other side of the river."

"All right, then. How do I know you won't just wait till we get to the other side and then kill me?" said the frog.

"Ah," crooned the scorpion, "because you see, once you've taken me to the other side of this river, I will be so grateful for your help that it would hardly be fair to reward you with death, now would it?"

So the frog agreed to take the scorpion across the river. He swam over to the bank and settled himself near the mud to pick up his passenger. The scorpion crawled onto the frog's back, his sharp claws prickling the frog's soft hide, and the frog slid into the river. The muddy water swirled around them, but the frog stayed near the surface so the scorpion would not drown. He kicked strongly through the first half of the stream, his flippers paddling wildly against the current.

Halfway across the river, the frog suddenly felt a sharp stinging pain in his back, and out of the corner of his eye, he saw the scorpion remove his stinger from the frog's back. A deadening numbness began to creep into his limbs.

"You fool," croaked the frog. "Now we shall both die! Why on earth did you do that?"

The scorpion shrugged, and did a little jig on the drowning frog's back. "I could not help myself. It's in my nature."

They both sank into the muddy waters of the swiftly flowing river.

Madam Speaker, it's in their nature, and I believe this totally tells us what's going on. It's in the nature of this governing party, it's in the nature of the third party: Tax and spend. I don't know who wants to be taxing and who wants to be spending, but they go along. It's in their

nature to spend. It's in their nature not to understand that they're sending Ontario down a path that is going to be tough to get out of. They're sending us down a path of no jobs. They're sending us down a path where we're going to cut services. We're going to end up having to cut health care and education, because they've spent so much money that we are so far in debt. It's in their nature. We can see from examples that have come up in the last few days. We've got the Drive Clean program, which the NDP supports; we've got the idea of bringing red light cameras to ticket people faster, which the NDP supports; we've got photo radar they've talked about, which the NDP supports; they want to add 75 cents on phone bills, which the NDP supports; they want to increase the HST on our bills because the NDP supports that as well.

I'm saying the NDP supports that because whatever this government does from this day forward, with their support on the budget, they support everything that this government is going to be doing and they're taking half the ownership of all the scandals that have occurred in this province over the last 10 years, because to them, if you give them a billion dollars, everything's okay.

I think the Ontario people have had enough of this problem in Ontario. The best way to hold this government to account is to put them to the polls, to the people, and let them decide. But instead, they're saying give them a billion dollars and they will support them from here on out. So anything, these new taxes, this new spending that this government is going to come forward with, the NDP is for that. The continuation of lost jobs in this province, the deterioration of our services, our health care, education: The NDP is fully supportive of anything this government does.

Madam Speaker, I think it's time that the NDP realize what they've done to this province by propping up this government.

0950

I don't understand why the NDP were so high in the polls, and since their leader decided to prop up this government, they've disappeared. They had it; they had the election, I think, where they could have possibly become the official opposition. They lost it. I don't understand why they made that mis-leadership.

Sorry, I digress, Madam Speaker. I'll get back to my speech here.

Interjections.

Ms. Sylvia Jones: That was part of the fable—

Mr. Jeff Yurek: Yes, the fable is over. We have over half a million people out of work across this province, and this government doesn't even acknowledge the basic economic fundamentals that drive job creation. No spending restraint, no jobs plan: These are the biggest problems facing our province, and this government refuses to address them.

These problems are not difficult to figure out; they are hard to fix. Perhaps that's why this government does not act. They would have to make tough decisions that not everyone would like, but these decisions are necessary for the future of our province. True leadership involves

making decisions for the betterment of the community, regardless of how unpopular the decisions may be. We have not seen any kind of leadership from this current government. It's time for a change.

There has only been one person showing true vision and true leadership through these trying times in Ontario. There has only been one person who has laid out a vision for Ontario that would return us to our rightful position as the economic leader of Canada. That person is Tim Hudak, and I'm proud to stand with him and the rest of my colleagues in the PC Party to reject this government's spending bill.

The best way to fix this scandalous government is to bring them to the polls, this government propped up by the NDP for a billion dollars and a Financial Accountability Office. The best way to hold this government to account is to defeat this government and this budget and take them down to the polls and let the people of Ontario decide, because the way the province is headed down this path, it's going to be hard to get out. I think we've had this experience back in the 1990s when Bob Rae was the Premier of Ontario. It took a man like Mike Harris to turn this government around, create over a million jobs and return to its prosperity.

What this government has done in the last 10 years to this province is disgraceful. All we need to look at is, in the last three years, what we've dug up, with scandalous government. The gas plant scandal, in order to save four seats, to spend \$585 million plus—just imagine what the Auditor General in August is going to find out, at the end of the summer, about how much more money. When that number comes out, we all know that the NDP is supportive of that government that's spending that half a billion to a billion dollars in order to save members' seats.

Madam Speaker, I'd like to take this forward.

Interjections.

Mr. Jeff Yurek: I'd like to hear more about this accountability office. They keep yelling at me. I don't know how someone could predict that this government is going to waste \$2 billion in eHealth. I'm not sure how someone could decide how that could occur in that system. I can see where you're taking this plan forward, and this is how you're going to spend the money, but you can't control what these people do, once they get into power, how they can do that. You can't control that.

I think this budget shows nothing for jobs. My riding needs jobs. There's nothing in this budget that's going to help create an environment so that we can have investment back into this province, so that we can bring jobs back in. I have too many friends who have lost their jobs over the last six years due to this government's inability to govern: 6,300 jobs lost in my province.

Interjection.

Mr. Jeff Yurek: Well, there are lots of things to stimulate jobs.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Name them.

Mr. Jeff Yurek: Well, first of all, we'd cut regulations. We would ensure that hydro rates are done being skyrocketed. We'd make it affordable; we'd make it—competition in the marketplace.

The main thing that I can't believe people don't agree with: The apprenticeship ratio down to 1 to 1 is the quickest job creator. I talked to the Ontario Electrical League two weeks ago, and they said they'd hire immediately if they had 1-to-1 apprenticeship ratios. That's stifling the job growth, and I can't believe the NDP can't figure that out. I thought they were better than that. But a 1-to-1 ratio is the way—out west, it's 1 to 2. How can you compete with that? I've got people's friends heading down out west to get jobs. My own nephew had to leave this province because he couldn't find a job.

This is Ontario. This is the best province in Canada. We should be much better than we are. Why can't we take simple steps from being the government and get this economy rolling again? Step one: apprenticeship ratios, 1 to 1.

Madam Speaker, we don't support this budget. We don't support the NDP-Liberal budget, and we're going to vote against—

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further debate?

Mr. Steve Clark: I'm pleased to join in the debate this morning. We've had a lot of debate on the amendment and the motion, so I want to take people back to exactly what we are debating today, and then also do as some of my colleagues have done, and that's put some of their constituents' comments on the record, because I know that when we go back to our ridings—certainly when I was back in my riding on the weekend, I got to attend a lot of events, and I heard loud and clear from the constituents of Leeds-Grenville how disappointed they are in this government's budgetary policy, how disappointed—

Interjection.

Mr. Steve Clark: You know what? I'm glad the minister mentioned Senator Runciman because Senator Runciman did a tremendous job last night. Unfortunately, because we are in a minority Parliament, we all can't rush back to our ridings. My riding's about three and a half hours away. But my wife, Deanna, was at an event that the good senator hosted last evening. It was a fundraiser for Community and Primary Health Care in Brockville that is building a new facility with the help of the province. The province kicked in probably—I think it's about \$3.7 million; the federal government, roughly \$3 million, and there is a local fundraising campaign for about \$2.9 million. One of his special guests, I'm sure the minister will be happy, was—

Hon. James J. Bradley: Mike Duffy?

Mr. Steve Clark: No—Dr. Wilbert Keon, who is chair of the Champlain LHIN. He was there. As well, Speaker—through you to the minister—Max Keeping, the former CTV anchor—

Interjection: Newscaster.

Mr. Steve Clark: —newscaster at CTV Ottawa, was also there.

It was a wonderful fundraiser for that great organization. Unfortunately, I don't have the amount that was

raised last night, but I know that certainly that centre of excellence will provide exceptional health care, not just for the people of Brockville, but for other clients that they serve within Leeds-Grenville. I believe—

Hon. James J. Bradley: Give him my best—

Mr. Steve Clark: I will. Minister, I'm glad that you asked. I will extend your best wishes to the senator, and I'm glad that the minister brought that up this morning, because it just happened last night. It was perfect timing. Thank you very much.

Today, the amendment that my friend from Lanark-Frontenac-Lennox and Addington amended the motion with actually was to deal with the fact that the House prorogued. As we all remember, with this terrible gas plant scandal—I believe it's the worst scandal that's happened in the history of Ontario. It was a horrible scandal. The government prorogued Parliament. They ran and they hid for four months on the scandal.

Even yesterday, we had revelations in this House of documents that were part of a—I think it's a fourth or fifth—document dump that the government set forward that they're contemplating more revenue tools, more taxes. It just seems that this government continues its tax-and-spend ways as we continue to spiral out of control. I've said it here in the House many times that we used to be the economic engine of this country, and now we're the caboose under this Liberal government.

So the member for Lanark-Frontenac-Lennox and Addington tabled an amendment that, in the event that we do prorogue—and that's always a possibility with this government—Mr. Wilson's want of confidence motion would still stay on the books and be dealt with at a certain point down the road.

1000

I think, again, if a government has confidence in their governance and their budgetary policy, I don't know why they would be so concerned about a want of confidence. You would think that the government would welcome setting that vote aside and having a vote between the opposition and the New Democrats. Again, they'll have to speak for themselves, whether they agree or not, but I certainly agree with the amendment. I think the member has tabled an exceptional section to be added to this substantive motion, and I hope that members will support it.

The New Democrats—my friend from Trinity-Spadina mentioned this morning the accountability office. On the main motion that the government House leader and the New Democrat House leader dreamt up without my House leader's input—

Interjection: Dreamt up?

Mr. Steve Clark: Well, they did; they concocted it in one of the backrooms at the Legislature; certainly, our House leader wasn't involved.

I'm reading the document about the Financial Accountability Officer. You know, I said to one of their members this morning, I think I'm a member of the Financial Accountability Office; it's called the Legislative Assembly of Ontario. There are 107 members, and we don't need to

start another office or hire more employees or create more bureaucracy. We in this Legislature, the 107 members, to me are the ultimate accountability office. We continue in this House to take away our responsibilities, to take our responsibilities and give them to an appointed position. Again, I'm not sure why we continue to take powers away from elected members of the Legislature, when ultimately it's our responsibility to act in a responsible way in this House. Certainly, constituents believe that in a minority Parliament situation we should be doing that. Speaker, I just wanted to put those comments on the record.

I also want to acknowledge that we have some physiotherapists here today. They had a breakfast this morning. Many of them will be meeting with members of the Legislature throughout the day. Last week, during the budget debate on the budget motion, I had put some comments on the record from Gary Rehan, who is a physiotherapist. He provides services at Rosebridge Manor. Gary is here today; I got to talk to him. Certainly he's very concerned about what's happening on August 1, when the government's proposed changes take place. I put them on the record last week, and I hope that other members, during debate today, will take the chance to put forward some of their ideas.

They're very concerned about the delisting of physiotherapy services. Members who attended the breakfast this morning agreed that they obviously were very concerned. They wanted to get their message out. They wanted us to know about services in not just retirement homes but long-term-care homes, and as well in other settings. I had 20 members from a seniors' exercise group at the Executive Condominium call my office with concern about their twice-a-week programs. When you hear about an exercise program—I asked the physiotherapists this morning, "Just what does that mean?" I was pleased to note that there's also one-on-one physiotherapy being done at that time. Certainly they told me that the work that they do in those home settings helped prevent those residents from ending up in a retirement home. As well, there have been cases that Gary mentioned to me this morning, where he's worked at the long-term-care home, been able to provide his physiotherapy services, and people have then transitioned back into retirement homes, some even back into their own homes.

So I think it's a very important service that they provide. I appreciate the fact that they came to the Legislature today and had the breakfast. I commend them for the information they gave members. I know the minister was here this morning during prayers, and we had a bit of banter back and forth with her. We sort of joked that she should go downstairs and have breakfast with the group. She obviously articulated what her position was, and I appreciate that. But one of the things that rang clear this morning at this breakfast was that these physiotherapists were not consulted. They felt shut out of the process, and I think we all agree that in a minority Parliament that shouldn't happen.

We should be able to take a step back from some of these announcements and have some meaningful dialogue with people who provide physiotherapy services in our communities. We owe it to them. They look after the most vulnerable in our community, and I think we shouldn't move ahead on this without taking a step back and consulting the people who provide this front-line physiotherapy service. I wanted to put that on the record, Speaker.

I also wanted to make sure I spoke about a family in my riding of Leeds-Grenville. One of the areas where I think this government has let down people is in the area of health care. We've heard the minister boast from time to time that, in her opinion, she's doing a wonderful job. But the reality is that individual MPPs like me hear from constituents dealing with the health care system, and they have something entirely different to say.

As I mentioned just a few moments ago, seniors in Leeds-Grenville have been contacting me every day to speak out about the dramatic cuts they see to physiotherapy services. As many members found out this morning, the clock is ticking on that August 1 implementation date, and again, I want to thank them for coming.

What disturbs Ontarians when they read about either these physiotherapy cuts or the lack of inspections at long-term-care facilities is the contrast we have in the stories like eHealth and the gas plant scandal. You've got billions of dollars that are being poured down the drain on the gas plant scandal and eHealth. I think what we need to say is, we need to look after some of our people who are vulnerable.

In Leeds-Grenville, the people I want to talk about today, who are very concerned that there's money for those types of scandals, and there's no money for health care, is a family called the Smith family. Duane and his wife, Christine, have been forced to raise \$200,000 to pay for surgeries for their son, Charlie, and their sister, Jessica, who have had surgeries within—she certainly had surgeries over the past six months. They suffer from Ehlers-Danlos syndrome, or EDS. They require a life-saving treatment that is provided by a leading-edge surgeon in the United States in Maryland.

I can remember going to Charlie's house just close to Athens and seeing him prior to his surgery in December. He was in his bed, which was a place he had basically been in for most of that year. Despite an ailment that left him bedridden, doctors here essentially looked at him and said there was nothing they could do for him. Specialists the family visited earlier that year said that it was either in Charlie's head, or his family should basically put him in a long-term-care home. The doctors didn't really care to learn about the new methods that were provided in the US. In fact, one, when they knew they had contacted their member of provincial Parliament, actually tried to get him to sign a form saying he wouldn't share his file or any of the conversation they had with the doctor. Without that signature from that specialist on that OHIP out-of-country form, there's definitely no coverage for his surgery in Maryland. That was a change the govern-

ment ushered in quietly some time ago without much fanfare.

But I want to tell you, Speaker, that the community did come through for Charlie. He got that first surgery, despite the minister's or this government's policy. After 14 hours of surgery, he was up and walking for the first time in months. I can tell you, it was a pretty emotional time when Charlie walked into my constituency office just after New Year's. I couldn't believe that here was a gentleman who had been bedridden, who surgeons had basically written off and, like I said, said it was in his head or said there was nothing in Canada we could do for him. To have him walk through—first of all, I didn't know he was that tall; he's about six foot four. He really had a smile on his face and was very, very happy.

1010

Now it's his sister, Jessica, who has recently had two EDS-related surgeries in Maryland. She has basically gotten the same response from doctors and specialists here, even though she was able to show them the videos of Charlie and what happened to him before his surgery and what he's like today.

Again, thanks to the minister's policies, there's no specialist sign-off. The Smith family can't even plead their case for out-of-country coverage with OHIP, and it's because of that change and the fact that no specialist will sign that form that they can't even plead to try to get their money.

But I am happy to tell you that Jessica is doing very well. She's on her way back home to Leeds-Grenville, but certainly the family struggles to pay for her treatment. It will go on and on, probably for years.

I can't say it any better than Jessica did. She made a posting on her Facebook page over the weekend and I promised her that I would read the posting into the record this morning.

This is from Jessica:

"I am noticing improvements every day, and I am just so happy and thankful to have been able to come here once again for this doctor to save my life, after being let down so badly by doctors in Canada. I know I wouldn't be here without all of your love, generosity, and support, so thank you from the bottom of my heart. Since I began suffering from EDS almost eight years ago, dealing with doctors here has always been a struggle—I often say that sometimes it is more painful and exhausting than dealing with EDS itself. Every time I have to plead with doctors to believe me, or believe in EDS, it breaks me just a little more inside. These encounters where I have to fight for my dignity with the ones who are responsible for caring for me, is itself one of the biggest barriers to me improving my health. But when I am here in Maryland, where EDS patients are seen just as often as non-EDS patients, there is no more struggle. We are believed, accepted, and treated with dignity and respect by the entire medical profession. The work these doctors are nurses are doing here for people with EDS is healing in every way imaginable ... they aren't just healing my joints, they are truly healing my soul. They treat me like a real person,

they really 'get' my disorder, and sincerely care about my well-being. Someday, Canada will get there too, but right now our system right now is broken in so many ways. What we can do for now is raise awareness, and hope that the people that need to listen, will listen."

As we debate the motion today and consider whether this government has the confidence of Ontarians, I'm thinking about Charlie and Jessica. I'm hoping that the health minister and her staff will listen not to me, but to Jessica's heartfelt words.

I've talked to the minister a number of times. I think the last time we had a substantive conversation about this was back in November on a conference call. I wasn't particularly happy with the response that the minister had given not to me, but to the EDS community, so I'm hoping that if she won't listen to me she'll at least listen to Jessica and Charlie. How many like them could get the treatment they need without having to rely on the kindness of neighbours and strangers if we had a government that put the people's interests ahead of their own?

If someone wants to know why I am debating the motion today, it's because the last thing we need is to speed the budget through. This is our opportunity as members of the Legislative Assembly to hold the government to account and to explain how their reckless mismanagement of Ontario's finances is dealing with the people we represent.

I promised the Smiths that I would make sure their words were on the record. I could have brought them here and put them in the west members' gallery and put a question to the minister during question period. I don't think the family—they've travelled enough, to go to Maryland, and I don't think we need to bring them up here. What we need is we need the government to act. I wanted to make sure that I used the opportunity this morning to represent them, I hope in a respectful way.

I really would hope that the government would look at what the opposition has been saying. Some of my colleagues have talked about some of the policies that we've developed over the last year. I think we've shown time and time again that we're not just objecting; we're also proposing some ideas. I hope that I've been able to do that this morning. Speaker, I just want to thank you for giving me this opportunity.

Debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): It is 10:15. This House stands recessed until 10:30.

The House recessed from 1016 to 1030.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: I'm very pleased to welcome 25 physiotherapists from my riding who are in the House today. I'm not able to name them all individually, but they join us in the gallery in opposition to the government's upcoming cuts physiotherapy services. I support them and the excellent care that they are providing for seniors and families in Halton. I was pleased to read their petition last Thursday.

Hon. Eric Hoskins: I am pleased to welcome members from CJPAC, the Canadian Jewish Political Affairs Committee, to Queen's Park today. Hi guys. With us in the House today are Laura Sohinki—the associate director of outreach—Rachel Devon, Michelle Gordon, Alon Sone, Aidan Fishman and Shir Barzilay.

Mr. Monte McNaughton: I would like to welcome to Queen's Park today the family of page Andréa Franche: her mother, Christine; her father, Gino; sister Alyssa; brother Nicholas; grandmother Eileen; and grandfather William. They'll be in the members' gallery this morning.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I would like to welcome all the physiotherapists who are here in great numbers in order to highlight their cause, and hopefully the government is going to mend their ways.

Hon. Teresa Piruzza: I would like to echo the welcome to page captain Andréa Franche's family, who is with us here today. We have Eileen and William Burke, the very proud grandparents from Windsor, as well as the rest of the family: Nicholas, Alyssa, Christine and Gino. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Mr. John O'Toole: Welcome to the physiotherapists, but more specifically, Tony Melles, as well as Meagan Mabady and Patricia Kimmerly, all providing services to seniors in Ontario.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: I would like to welcome, in the members' west gallery, my constituency assistant from Essex, Jody Percy, who is here for his first ever live viewing of question period.

Mr. Michael Harris: I'd like to welcome a good friend of mine, and president of Arvan Rehab, Bill Arvanitis, who's joining us in the members' gallery. Enjoy.

Mr. Jack MacLaren: I'd like to introduce guests who are physiotherapists: Gary Rehan, who's from my riding—Gary, do you want to stand up?—also John Fragis, Judy Wong and Beth Tsai, and all the other physiotherapists who've joined us today.

Ms. Catherine Fife: I would like to recognize today our page captain, Jeffrey Lin, a grade 7 student from Laurelwood Public School in Waterloo. As well, Jeffrey's mother is here with us today, Lily Lin. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Mme France Gélinas: I would like to introduce Tony Melles, the executive director of the Designated Physiotherapy Clinics Association; Toula Reppas, the president of the Designated Physiotherapy Clinics Association; Tina Bishai; Karen Fisher; and Bill Arvanitis. Fellow physiotherapists, welcome to Queen's Park.

Hon. Charles Sousa: I wish to welcome in the members' gallery three individuals, officials from Portugal, from the island of Madeira: Doutor Conceição Almeida Estudante, who's a minister and a regional secretary of Madeira; as well as Mr. Gonçalo Nuno dos Santos, also an advisor to the regional secretary; and the Consul General of Portugal in Toronto, Doutor Júlio Vilela. Welcome to Queen's Park. Bemvindo.

Mr. Frank Klees: I also want to welcome representatives of the physiotherapy profession who are here today.

I want to thank them for the valuable services they provide, especially to seniors across our province. We wish them well in their lobbying of this government today.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I'm going to take a moment to address the issue of introductions. It was designed by the previous Speaker to introduce individuals who have come to visit us. No other comments were asked to have been made, and I'd appreciate it if members would always stay to that process. You have members' statements and everything else to do that. Thank you.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. I'm not seeking any dialogue on that either.

It is now time for question period.

ORAL QUESTIONS

USER FEES

Mr. Tim Hudak: My question is to the Premier. Premier, I call your attention to your treasury board—Management Board of Cabinet—document called 2013-14 Non-Tax Revenue Proposals. Initially when I raised concerns about the \$270 million in proposed Wynne-Liberal tax grabs, your finance minister said I was making it up. Then he proceeded to say, when I presented him with a copy of the document, that, "Okay, you weren't making it up, but the bureaucrats made this up." I guess the bureaucrats made him do it.

Premier, frankly, I don't think that's probably true. I guess my question for you is, who ordered the government-wide increase in user fees? Was it you or was it your finance minister? Please tell us: Whose bright idea was this from the get-go?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: You know, I appreciate the question from the Leader of the Opposition. I know that the Leader of the Opposition has sat in cabinet, and I know he understands that what responsible government does is look at a range of options in discussing policy development, in discussing a budget. So I know that the Leader of the Opposition understands that the document that was circulated was an early draft. It contains ideas that were actually rejected in the planning process.

But what it demonstrates is that this government looks at a range of options. Civil servants bring forward information; they bring forward possibilities. Then that discussion happens, and the politicians make decisions about how they're going to go forward.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Tim Hudak: Back to the Premier, who seems to be following this line of reasoning that the bureaucrats suddenly came up with this: I think what it clearly demonstrates is an insatiable Liberal appetite to increase taxes across the board. If there is a pocketbook out there that has not yet been fleeced, you've got a big target on it.

Let me give you some examples of your more than 50 fee increases across the province. If you use a phone or a

cellphone, you want to make it more expensive. If you drive a car or a truck, you want to make it more expensive. If you're a family who likes to take the kids fishing or camping, the Wynne-McGuinty Liberals want to make it more expensive.

Premier, why is it that you're always lecturing Ontarians that they need to tighten their belts when you've done not one single thing to tighten your own? When is enough enough?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: So, really, what the Leader of the Opposition is talking about is what I believe is a prudent planning process. It is only prudent that government would look at a range of options.

The issues and initiatives that the Leader of the Opposition is raising are things that were not included in our budget, that were not included in our planning process. But to suggest that somehow it would be prudent of government not to look at a full range of options is just not reasonable.

I was not suggesting that the civil service brought forward these suggestions without them being requested. The reality is that our government says, "Let's look at all the possibilities. Let's look at what we should"—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): That's about the level it should be. I'm hearing it from both sides, those giving the answer and those asking the question, so please refrain.

Premier, wrap up, please.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Officials across government need to plan for numerous scenarios. You cannot do that unless you have all the information. We have worked with all the information.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary.

Mr. Tim Hudak: Speaker, respectfully, back to the Premier, she says they're looking at numerous scenarios. It's not true. The only scenario you look at is how to take more money out of the pockets of hard-working Ontario men and women.

Quite frankly, Premier, when we have 600,000 women and men who wake up every morning with no job, they look at themselves in the mirror and try to convince themselves that today they'll get that job. At the end of the day, at the end of the week, they still have no job. Not a single job will be created by this increase in taxes across the board from telephones to driver registrations to the cost of taking your kids camping.

I guess the basic question to the Premier is, if you're truly looking at a range of options, where are your options in terms of reducing spending, cancelling outdated programs and getting spending under control? Why do you always look at taxes? Why don't you actually try to cut spending for a change?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Thank you.

Premier?

1040

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: The initiatives the Leader of the Opposition is talking about are things that were not adopted by this government. I don't know how to make it more clear. We did not go with these options. We looked at them. We talked about them. The civil service talked about them. They were options that were brought forward. We did not go forward with them.

What's in our budget are initiatives that are going to create jobs in this province: a youth employment process, youth employment funds that are going to create jobs for young people across the province; investment in health care, in home care, that is going to allow people in their homes to get the care they need; infrastructure investment that is going to create the conditions for the job creation that industry can do. That's what's in our budget. What the member opposite is talking about are initiatives that are not in our plan.

USER FEES

Mr. Tim Hudak: I'll try the finance minister on his document, because clearly the Premier hasn't read it yet. Your own document talks about, on page 3, that you've actually approved a number of fee hikes already. It says, "Proposals approved in principle."

The others are things that you say may or may not be on the table; you said they're not adopted. I think what the Premier forgot to say is "yet."

So I'll ask the finance minister: Yesterday, you said you ruled out photo radar but that basically means you're ruling the other 49 in. Let's try this again. The Premier says these things are not happening. Will you today say that you're not going to put a new tax on phones and cellphones in the province? Tell us that.

Hon. Charles Sousa: If the member opposite had bothered to read the budget, he'd very clearly understand that none of those issues were adopted. We were very clear in our budget in 2012 that we would review certain items. The PCs are obviously playing games with documents that we released in good faith to them in the justice committee. We would expect them to have the responsibility—they asked us not to redact anything, so we released everything. And now they're using various documents—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I'll start—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock a moment, please. Regrettably, I couldn't pinpoint the exact place where that word came from. But if that member knows they said that, I'll allow them to stand and withdraw.

Now, that goes for all members, while I'm standing, that I'm making an attempt to try to bring decorum to the House.

Wrap up please, Finance Minister.

Hon. Charles Sousa: As a result of the prudent measures we've taken, we've beaten our targets consistently

year over year over the last three or four years; \$21 billion has been reduced from our targets, last year alone \$5 billion. We're controlling our spending. We're taking the measures necessary to renew our economy.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Tim Hudak: Again, I don't think the minister addressed my question. In fact, Minister, your document says you have approved \$22 million in new fee increases. Again, it's on page 3 of your document that I gave you yesterday, and I'm happy to give you another copy, if needed. The others are on the table.

Now, the Premier says that they weren't in the budget, and if I understand that conclusion, therefore they're not going to be adopted. So if it's that simple, just tell us straight up today. I think you owe it to Ontarians not to have another sneaky tax increase like you did you with the eco tax. Tell us, is there a tax coming on the phone bill or the cellphone bill? It's in your document. The Premier says it's off the table. Yesterday, you said photo radar was off the table, so the next big thing: Please tell us, are you taking the phone tax off the table? Is it on the table? Are you going to try to sneak it in?

Hon. Charles Sousa: The member opposite—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Look, that is enough. I will be coming to individual members.

Minister?

Hon. Charles Sousa: The member opposite is taking documents—these are documents of early provisions and early ideas that were not adopted. The officials that have provided these documents have done so—and they've assessed a variety of risks—in the public interest and in an appropriate manner. We, however, will not be playing games with these documents, as the member opposite is trying to do. We've been transparent and we haven't wavered.

More importantly, our budget in 2013 has very clearly outlined some of the challenges ahead, and we recognize that there are difficult choices to make, choices that the opposition is not prepared to make in the end. So we will continue to do what's right in the public interest. We will consult with Ontarians, and we will take the actions necessary for their benefit.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary.

Mr. Tim Hudak: I'm finding the finance minister's answer, respectfully, a little slippery here. Yesterday, you said I was making this up, and then you said, "Okay, they're in the document, but we're not doing them." Then you say, "Photo radar is off the list, but the other ones are still on the table." You said they're not in the budget; therefore, they're not going to have them. But then you seem to be saying, "Okay, we're maybe going to have them."

Just cut aside all this grey area. Just stand up in your place and tell us yes or no. What's on the table? What's off the table? Minister, are you bringing in a brand new tax on cellphones—crystal clear—yes or no?

Hon. Charles Sousa: If the member opposite wants clarity, read the budget. That is what we're doing.

LONG-TERM CARE

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is for the Minister of Health. Three years ago, the Liberal government promised to conduct thorough, proactive inspections of all 600 long-term-care homes in Ontario by December 31, 2011. Can the minister tell us how many of these inspections the ministry actually completed?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: What I can tell the member opposite is that every long-term-care home in the province of Ontario is visited by an inspector at least once a year. On average, there are 3.7 inspections per year per home.

We have changed how we conduct inspections. I think it is absolutely important—vitally important—that when someone we love goes into a long-term-care home, we have the confidence that they are going to receive nothing but the finest possible care there. If there are things we can do to strengthen inspections, then I am absolutely prepared to look at those options. But I can guarantee you that all of our long-term-care homes receive inspections every year at least.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Out of the 600 homes in this province, the government only proactively inspected 123 homes. Is this minister finally going to admit that she broke her promise to seniors?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Speaker, what I can tell you is that we have changed how we inspect long-term-care homes. They are much more resident-focused. They begin with interviewing residents, staff members and family members, so we have a more thorough understanding of the quality of care from the perspective of the residents. That is a philosophy that we have embraced, and it influences all of the inspections.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Hamilton East-Stoney Creek, come to order.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: It's important that everyone—and I'm talking now to the public, who need to have confidence in long-term-care homes, that the homes are inspected, the standards are high. There are many initiatives under way to improve the quality of care in long-term-care homes. We have more inspectors inspecting, and the inspections are more thorough.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Last week, in her local paper, the Minister of Health insisted that the government had never made such a commitment, saying, "The intent was never to do full inspections in all homes." Is the minister now prepared to admit that that statement that she made to her paper last week was incorrect, that the Liberal government did promise these thorough inspections would take place, and that they have utterly failed to undertake them?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Speaker, I did not have the correct information when I spoke to that particular reporter; I had incorrect information. I now have the correct information, and that is why I've gone back to my officials and said, "We've been conducting inspections this way for about three years. Let's take a good hard look. How is it working? Are there things we can do to improve inspections?" I think that's the responsible thing to do.

As minister, I take that responsibility seriously. We are taking another look at the whole inspection protocol for long-term-care homes.

1050

LONG-TERM CARE

Ms. Andrea Horwath: The minister is quoted in her local paper saying, "Now, that I look at the documents and talk to ministry officials, I understand that initially (full inspections) were (expected)."

Yesterday, the minister claimed in this House that homes were being inspected, but that is not true, Speaker, at least according to the guidelines that her ministry set out. How is it that the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care doesn't know the proper guidelines for the inspections that she herself promised?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Well, Speaker, here we go again. Let's be really clear. Every home is inspected at least once every year. So to suggest that homes are not being inspected is absolutely false. I think it's important to understand that there are three different kinds of inspections. There are inspections that are the result of complaints or critical incidents, and we're working very hard to increase the number of complaints that are reported so we can get into those homes and fix what's going on.

There are other inspections that are performed. When in fact there have been no complaints about a particular home, there is a proactive annual inspection there. In addition, there are RQI inspections, which take a team of three people about 10 days. They're very intensive. Those are the inspections that we have to look and see if there is a way to do more of them.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, it is a disgrace that this minister refuses to acknowledge publicly that they only inspected 123 of the 600 homes that they were supposed to have had inspected, and she needs to come clean on the facts in this regard. The inspection process promised by the government would mean inspectors would show up unannounced each and every year and could conduct thorough, proactive inspections so that crises could be prevented before they actually happen.

Seniors and their families have seen serious issues emerge in the long-term-care sector, in long-term-care homes, in this province, and the government had promised action on this file. Does the government have any intention whatsoever of keeping that promise to inspect

every single home each and every year so that seniors can be kept safe in their facilities?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Speaker, with respect, I think it is a disgrace that the leader of the third party is creating the impression that homes are not inspected, because they are inspected.

Let me just repeat some of the numbers from yesterday. In 2003, there were—

Mr. Paul Miller: You're a disgrace. You should resign.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Hamilton East-Stoney Creek, second time.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Northumberland, first time.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: —inspectors inspecting long-term-care homes. That includes seven new inspectors who were hired last year.

Since July 2010, there have been more than 6,700 inspections of long-term-care homes. Last year, there were 2,347 inspections. That is an average of 3.7 times per year, and every home receives at least one inspection a year.

Once complete, the inspection reports are published to the ministry's website, so we have increasing transparency for the people of Ontario. We are also looking—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Final supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, this has nothing to do with impressions; it has everything to do with the fact that this ministry broke its promise to inspect these homes in a proactive way. It's got nothing to do with impressions, just the facts.

The government promised to conduct thorough proactive inspections of 600 long-term-care homes each and every year. Three years later, 477 homes in this province still haven't had an inspection. When the minister was confronted with this fact, she denied ever making that promise at all. For seniors and their families, I have to say it is a stinging indictment of a government that seems more concerned with protecting itself yet again than with protecting the needs of the people in these long-term-care—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock. I'm finding that some of the heckling that's coming from somewhere else other than the party itself is interfering with my ability to hear the question.

Wrap up, please, quickly.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, this minister needs to stand in her place and admit that she broke her promise, that it's a problem and she has to fix it and protect the interests of seniors in long-term-care facilities.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Let me repeat, Speaker: I have asked our ministry officials to come back with ways to strengthen long-term-care home inspections, because I do think it's important that people have confidence in the quality of care they receive in long-term-care homes.

The member opposite is mixing up the facts. The facts are very, very clear. There were 2,347 inspections last year alone. Every home receives at least one inspection, on average 3.7.

There are a number of other initiatives that are really focusing on improving the quality of care in long-term-care homes, whether it's the Residents First program that is measuring and increasing the quality in various quality care, whether it's the 10,000 more people working in long-term-care homes, whether it's the 500 new behavioural support workers there—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

PHYSIOTHERAPY SERVICES

Mrs. Christine Elliott: My question is to the Minister of Health. Minister, as you know, hundreds of physiotherapists have come here today to represent seniors and to protest your government's changes to physiotherapy services in Ontario.

After consulting with organizations that currently provide front-line services, we've learned that your ministry developed these changes without consulting the designated physiotherapy clinics, the Ontario Retirement Communities Association or the Ontario Long Term Care Association. There is serious concern among these organizations, and even among your LHINs and CCACs, that the proposed changes will result in significant cuts to services provided to seniors.

Minister, will you delay these changes until you've actually consulted with the physiotherapists and front-line service providers and seniors affected by them?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Thank you.

Minister of Health and Long-Term Care.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Speaker, I find it passing strange that the Conservative Party is standing in the way, protesting change. They seem to call for change to get better value for money, but then when we actually come forward with a way to do that, they resist it. Whether it was our determination to reduce the price of generic drugs or whether it was our determination to control the costs of physician compensation, they talk a good talk but they do not walk the walk.

Let's be very, very clear about this: The changes we are making to improve physiotherapy services will be able to double the number of seniors in this province who will have access to physiotherapy. I think it's also important to acknowledge that the Ontario Physiotherapy Association is fully supportive of this change, as are more than 40 designated physiotherapy clinics who are not part of this particular organization, but have their own organization that—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Supplementary? The member for Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound.

Mr. Bill Walker: My question is for the Minister of Health again—a little rich, Minister, after the eHealth and Ornge boondoggles.

Like most Liberal policies, this physiotherapy direction has disaster written all over it. This is just another short-sighted policy that will hurt Ontarians. Seniors are afraid your plan to provide physio services through LHINs and CCACs will result in drastic cuts to their treatments. While you're giving us verbal assurances that seniors will not be limited to 12 treatments, the budget for physiotherapy has been set on that basis. We know you spent \$200 million last year on physiotherapy for seniors; this year you plan to spend just \$156 million. That's a \$44-million cut, Minister, projected in spending.

Minister, are you planning on cutting service to our valued seniors, or blowing yet another budget promise?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Thank you.

Minister of Health and Long-Term Care.

1100

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Well, Speaker, I don't know about you, but I find it passing strange that we could double access to physiotherapy, falls prevention programs—the fact that we could double access and increase our budget by only \$10 million, I think that even Conservatives would think that that's the right thing to do for the people of—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Huron-Bruce, come to order.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: As I said, there are many designated physiotherapy clinics—over 40 of them—that are actually working with us to make the appropriate changes. The physiotherapists' association of Ontario is fully behind these changes.

The old system was broken. It was not getting the outcomes that our seniors deserve to get. Many parts of this province do not have a physiotherapy clinic. In fact, I believe the member from Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound does not have a physiotherapy clinic. Seniors will be able to access physiotherapy.

Interjection: No, they won't.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Yes, they will.

TAXATION

Mr. Michael Prue: My question is to the Premier. Nickel-and-diming hard-working Ontarians by imposing a province-wide HST increase and increasing user fees is not our idea of a fair and balanced approach. Why is this government so intent on hitting hard-working Ontarians with a sales tax increase and new user fees while at the same time opening up a new \$1.3-billion corporate tax loophole?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I do have to say that I am astonished by the question from the member for Beaches-East York. It really seems to me that he would understand, having been a mayor of the former East York, that there are people across the GTHA—people who live in his constituency—who need better transit connections around the GTHA. They need to be able to

travel from the 416 area into the 905 area. They need to be able to travel back and forth to work, to be able to get their kids from daycare and to get their kids to school.

He would understand that investing in transit and creating a dedicated revenue stream for transit in the GTHA is an investment in the future that is absolutely critical to the economy and to the quality of life of people who live in this region.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Michael Prue: This New Democrat understands only too well that this transit has to be built, and New Democrats at all levels are prepared to do it, but hitting Ontarians with a sales tax increase, raising driver registration fees and adding another gas tax increase while Ontario families are having a tough time balancing the family budget is anything but fair and balanced.

Why is this government so determined to make life more difficult for hard-pressed Ontarians while it continues at the same time to open up new billion-dollar-plus tax loopholes for our wealthiest corporations?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: As the member opposite knows, the Minister of Finance has written to the federal Minister of Finance. This is not a loophole; this is an arrangement that was put in place when the tax regime changed. We have written to the Minister of Finance federally to say that we would like to continue to receive that revenue, but the fact is that without a dedicated revenue stream, we will not be able to make those investments that, quite frankly, should have been made over the last 40 years.

We are playing catch-up because government after government has not made the investments necessary, and investing in transit and infrastructure has to be done in an ongoing way. That's why we need the dedicated revenue stream. We would love to have the federal government take part in that and put in place a dedicated revenue stream of federal funding for transit.

But I say to the member opposite: We need the support of the people in this region. We need the support of the parties across the floor to make the investments that will improve the quality of life and improve the economy in the GTHA, because that's critical for the economy of the province.

ABORIGINAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Grant Crack: My question is to the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs. In this modern economic climate, many people, including those in aboriginal communities, are concerned about finding a good-paying job. It's widely known that the unemployment rate for aboriginal people is higher than the unemployment rate for non-aboriginal Ontarians. With that said, our government has put in place a number of initiatives and supports to help Ontarians all across the province during these challenging economic times.

Can the minister please tell everyone in this House what our government is doing to ensure that sufficient

supports and resources are available specifically for Métis individuals and businesses?

Hon. David Zimmer: Thank you for the question. I do understand the importance of sustainable economic development opportunities for the Métis Nation. The Métis Voyageur Development Fund is providing up to \$30 million over 10 years to support Métis businesses. This fund will assist Métis entrepreneurs and Métis businesses and companies in the resource sector to start and expand their business. The goal of the fund is to make strategic investments that will really contribute to the prosperity of the Métis community and Ontario. By supporting Métis economic development, we are supporting economic growth across this province, creating jobs for Métis and creating jobs for all Ontarians.

Our government values and appreciates the strong working relationship we have with the Métis Nation of Ontario, and we will continue to work to improve the well-being of the Métis community, because that helps us to protect everybody's jobs and everybody's economic future in Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Grant Crack: Thank you, Minister. It's good to hear that we're moving forward to help create jobs in the Métis community. Having a positive relationship with aboriginal communities allows us to work together to maximize many of the economic opportunities.

I understand, Minister, that this fund will receive provincial support in the form of \$3 million a year for 10 years. Can the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs please update us on the status of the Métis Voyageur Development Fund that he mentioned, and details on how this program is helping Métis people in Ontario?

Hon. David Zimmer: In August our government met with Gary Lipinski, the president of the Métis Nation of Ontario, and the Honourable Paul DeVillers, who is the chair and CEO of the fund, as well as his CEO, Steven Morse of the fund, to launch the Métis Voyageur Development Fund. It was impressive to see Métis entrepreneurs and business owners work first-hand with us on this project.

In March, at the Toronto Aboriginal Business Association Awards, we met Michelle Germain, a Métis shop owner who grew up in Sudbury. Michelle was honoured as the Aboriginal Businesswoman of the Year. She transformed her love for fashion into a growing business at a boutique called Shopgirls on Queen Street West. When Shopgirls opened in 2007, Michelle had to scout for designers to feature in her store. Now her inbox is full of designers who are coming to her because they want to be a part of her operation.

This is the kind of thing that the Métis development fund is going to work on. It's a bright future for Métis—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. New question.

USER FEES

Mr. Frank Klees: My question is to the Minister of Finance. Before I ask my question, I want, on behalf of

Ontario families and businesses, to thank our federal finance minister, Jim Flaherty, for standing with us in rejecting this government's \$2-billion tax increase.

But we know that that won't stop the government either, because they're looking to turn every government service into another revenue tool. In their non-tax revenue document, appendix after appendix is filled with creative ideas about how this government can go deeper into Ontarians' pockets. Schedule A: photo radar, red light cameras—and just to show that nothing is off limits, this minister's document proposes a 466% hike in the commercial driver's licence renewal fee for seniors over the age of 65.

I'd like to ask this question: Will anyone in the province be spared from this government's—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock. Be seated, please. Be seated, please. Thank you.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I'll wait.

Minister of Finance.

1110

Hon. Charles Sousa: I have to say, I would have expected the member opposite to take a little bit more care in the way he asked the question. I recognize the politics; I recognize the combative nature and the theatre that is being played in this House, but we have a much greater responsibility to the people of Ontario.

The member made reference to our federal minister. I appreciate the work the federal minister does. I did not, however, appreciate the fact that he came out with a letter when we've asked for nothing. We haven't put forward any such increases. We have not requested any support. We've made clear that we would do it together with the opposition and in consultation with the public. I want to—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Order.

Supplementary?

Mr. Frank Klees: If anyone is confused here, it's the minister. The fact of the matter is that we know full well that it's your agency. Everyone knows that you've asked for a 1% increase in the HST. The Minister of Finance is simply saying, "It's not on." He's joining us by saying, "It's not on."

What we are willing to do is to help the government find \$2 billion of dedicated revenue to build our transit. We've offered to form an all-party select committee to help him do that so we don't have to go into the pockets of ordinary, hard-working families and businesses who cannot afford it.

We have a \$127-billion budget. Ten years ago, that budget was \$71 billion. That is an increase of \$56 billion in 10 years. Can we find \$2 billion of waste and efficiency? Yes, and we're willing to help the government, because obviously they can't—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Order. At the risk of sounding too powerful, you might want to yell as loud as you can, but I have the last word, and I'll use it.

Minister of Finance.

Hon. Charles Sousa: I think what is confusing here is that the member opposite has just said that we're increasing the HST. You're wrong, because that is not what we're doing. New proposals and recommendations are being made by Metrolinx, by the municipalities, by a number of agencies, by the Toronto board of trade, by the Ontario Chamber of Commerce, all recognizing that we have to look at revenues, and we are looking at our spending. That's why we've reduced spending by below 1% year over year. That's why we have exceeded our targets—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Test laid down; test passed. The member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke is warned.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): And I'll respond to the opposite side, as well.

Finish your answer, please.

Hon. Charles Sousa: The member opposite also referenced our degree of spending, our degree of our budget. More years before, it was only \$27 billion. The fact is, our economy is growing. That also speaks to the growth in our GDP and the strength of our economy.

What we need is a federal government—if they're writing to us, saying they don't want to support—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. New question.

PHYSIOTHERAPY SERVICES

Ms. Catherine Fife: My question today is to the Minister responsible for seniors. Minister, why is your government cutting seniors' access to physiotherapy?

Hon. Mario Sergio: I appreciate the question from the member. I am sure that the minister responsible for health wants to perhaps deal with the supplementary question.

Let me say that as far as we are concerned, 218,000 more seniors are receiving the benefit of physiotherapy. This is the kind of service that we want to provide to our seniors in Ontario. I'm very thankful that the Premier and the Minister of Health are doing everything possible to increase the services we provide to our seniors.

I hope that we'll get the supplementary, and I will ask the Minister of Health, Speaker.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Catherine Fife: Minister, a cut is a cut is a cut. Last week, I visited residents of Clair Hills retirement home in Waterloo. Physiotherapy services are currently provided at Clair Hills, but seniors there have been told that they will no longer have services after August 1. When I asked the seniors, "Who needs physiotherapy in this room?", every hand in the room went up.

Our office received a letter from Else Poulsen, whose 88-year-old father is a resident at Luther Village Assisted Living in Waterloo. Else described the gains her father has made in balance, strength, mobility and emotional well-being from using physiotherapy. These gains are threatened because Luther Village will be losing physiotherapy services too.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Member from Eglinton–Lawrence, come to order—second time.

Ms. Catherine Fife: These are needed services—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock.

The member from Eglinton–Lawrence kept talking while I was trying to ask him to stop, and the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities will stop.

Please finish.

Ms. Catherine Fife: These are needed services that improve the lives of seniors across the province.

Minister, can you explain to these seniors, who have been told that they will be losing their physiotherapy services after August 1, how your government will continue to ensure they receive the physio care that they deserve?

Hon. Mario Sergio: Minister of Health.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Let's be really clear: Some seniors are being told they will lose services, but it is not true. They are being told that by the companies represented here today—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The Minister of the Environment—stop the clock. The Minister of the Environment is warned.

Finish your answer, please.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Let's be clear: The Ontario Physiotherapy Association strongly supports the changes. There are over 40 designated physiotherapy clinics that are working with us to ensure people get care, but the numbers are important. Because of these changes, because we believe in physiotherapy and we believe in exercise and falls prevention, 68,000 more seniors will have access to exercise and falls prevention programs. All long-term-care residents will receive the one-on-one physiotherapy they need, plus group exercise. In-home physiotherapy will be expanded by 60,000 people and clinic-based physiotherapy will be expanded by 90,000 people.

ELECTRICAL SAFETY

Mr. Steven Del Duca: My question today is for the Minister of Consumer Services. Over the last few weeks, I have heard many news reports about weather mishaps happening all over the province. Ontarians have experienced everything from numerous thunderstorms over a short period of time to large-level flooding to even reports of a tornado touching down in the province. In communities across Ontario, there have also been inci-

dents when powerful thunderstorms have brought down power lines, leaving live wires on neighbourhood roads.

This is a concern with regard to electrical safety, so I'd like to ask the minister to please share with the House how the government ensures that electrical safety is maintained in Ontario.

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: I am very happy that the member from Vaughan has brought up this very important safety concern, and I'm very happy to inform the House. In fact, there is an independent regulatory authority to protect and educate Ontario about electrical safety. That's called the ESA, the Electrical Safety Authority.

The main focus of the ESA is to enforce Ontario's electrical safety code, raise awareness and educate people on how to keep safe when handling electric products of all types. In fact, in 2012, the ESA received over 5,000 customer service calls, conducted over 450,000 inspections—that's 450,000—carried out over 2,000 investigations, and they recalled over 65 unsafe products.

This is a very important agency that is focused on inspections, supporting investigations and monitoring the marketplace to promote product safety.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Steven Del Duca: I thank the minister for her answer. I'm happy to hear more about the Electrical Safety Authority to understand that they are there to protect and educate the public with regard to electrical safety. But in situations involving stormy and unpredictable weather, like we've seen over the past number of weeks, I am concerned about further emergencies arising from mishaps involving electricity.

While electricity plays an important part in our everyday lives, it can also be dangerous, and is made even more dangerous when mixed with water and topped off with other incidents arising from stormy weather.

Can the minister please share with us how people can best protect themselves from dangerous situations involving electricity?

1120

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: I'm always happy to share with this House information to increase public safety and the issues associated with that. The ESA has a model, in fact. It's called Look Up, Look Out. If there are downed power lines in neighbourhoods, people should take caution, of course, and stay at least 10 metres away. Downed power lines may still be energized and pose danger. Residents should wait for their local electrical utility company to either disconnect or complete repairs before going anywhere near them.

In flooding situations, people should not assume any part of a flooded installation is safe. That includes the main breaker. With regard to appliances that have been wet, you should never attempt to use them until they've been checked or serviced by an electrician or a service agency.

I encourage everyone to visit the ESA's website for more safety tips involving all types of electrical situations.

DRIVE CLEAN

Mr. Michael Harris: My question is to the environment minister. Recently uncovered treasury board documents reveal that the Liberal government has been plotting to charge an additional \$18.3 million in Drive Clean fees. Minister, as I'm sure you know from talking with former Environment Minister Norm Sterling, this program was supposed to be phased out 10 years after its inception, as technology and fuel standards improved. Well, that time has come and gone, yet you're not planning a phase-out. Instead, you're planning to make the program permanent, and you've even—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Complete, please.

Mr. Michael Harris: You've even been caught devising a scheme to impose nearly \$20 million in new fees.

Minister, will you for once be honest with Ontarians and admit that you're only continuing this program for the money and not for the environment?

Hon. James J. Bradley: Once again I say here we are in clean air week, tomorrow Clean Air Day, and the Conservative Party is launching its war on clean air. The people of this—

Interjections.

Hon. James J. Bradley: The largest source of smog in the province of Ontario at this time comes from vehicles. This program, which has been endorsed by the Environmental Commissioner, who is appointed by all members of this House, Gordon Miller; by the doctors for the environment, who have said that this is absolutely essential to have—and it's having a profound effect on improving air quality in this province. Here the Conservative Party is, in Environment Week, launching yet another attack on a program that is having a profound effect, positively, on their—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

I believe somebody on this side has been warned; I'm not sure. Just a reminder.

Supplementary?

Mr. Michael Harris: Minister, your responses on this issue prove you'll stop at nothing to continue this temporary program indefinitely.

Last December, the Auditor General reported that the government collects \$30 million a year in fees for Drive Clean, but only spends \$19 million to operate the program. That means there's already an \$11-million surplus. Now, recently uncovered treasury board documents reveal you want to secretly hike Drive Clean fees again to increase the surplus to \$30 million. When asked about this scheme yesterday, the finance minister would not rule out these fee hikes.

Minister, will you do the right thing today and show some leadership to your tax-and-spend caucus for a change by renouncing this blatant attempt to fleece tax-payers?

Hon. James J. Bradley: As the treasurer of the province said in his response, all of these options are put forward to every government that exists out there. The government rejected those options available.

I have the advantage of having been here when a previous Mike Harris was the Premier of this province. There wasn't a day that went by that not only did they look at implementing these increases in fees, but they actually implemented them and brought them into effect.

Interjection: Nine hundred and sixty.

Hon. James J. Bradley: The last figure I saw was 978 fee increases under the Conservative government. There's probably far more; I could not calculate them. I'm trying to get some help from my friend the government House leader—

Interjections.

Hon. James J. Bradley: You people increased fees every day. Our government rejected those fee increases.

HOSPITAL SERVICES

M^{me} France Gélinas: Ma question est pour la ministre de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée. Today, busloads of Ontarians have joined us at Queen's Park. They come from small, rural and northern communities. They are here to bring attention to the deep cuts their hospitals are facing, in communities like Picton, Prince Edward county, Chatham, Wallaceburg, Perth, Smiths Falls, Iroquois Falls, Quinte West, St. Joseph Island, Manitoulin Island, and the list goes on.

Basic hospital services are being threatened. My question is simple: Does the minister think it is her responsibility to provide hospital services to all Ontarians, or only those living in urban areas?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Our commitment to small, rural hospitals is strong, because we know how important those hospitals are to those communities, and we want people to get the same access to care, no matter where they live in the province. That's why we've increased our investment in small rural hospitals by \$90 million since 2003, and we've built four new rural hospitals.

In addition, and I think this is important, our budget—that I hope will be passed—includes a special 1% base increase only for those small rural hospitals, and it builds on something that we did last year, which was a special \$20-million transformation fund for those small rural hospitals. We saw fantastic results from that fund this past year, so we are going to continue to do that, not just this year, but into the future as well. Small rural hospitals are a vitally important part of our health care system.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

M^{me} France Gélinas: Ontarians living in small, rural or northern communities need access to hospital services. After years of cuts to their emergency departments, to their acute care services and to dozens of hospital programs, there is only so much a small hospital can take before it, frankly, ceases to function.

This government has been cutting away at small hospitals' services for so long that most of them are at a breaking point. Is the minister going to listen to the people who are here, who made the trip from rural, northern and small communities, and finally work to protect these unique and vital small, rural and northern hospitals?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: If you call “\$90 million more” neglect, then I just simply disagree with that. We do see those small rural hospitals as vital parts of their communities, and patients rely on them. We’re really working hard to bring services closer to home, and many patients can leave—if they need to go to a large urban hospital, they can come home to that small hospital more quickly with the right supports.

We really do see those small rural hospitals as vitally important. That’s why they are getting a 1% base increase; our larger hospitals are not. That’s why they are getting that special transition fund, so they can take advantage of things like telemedicine; they can take advantage of innovation to provide even more care in smaller communities.

AGRI-FOOD INDUSTRY

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: I’ve got a question this morning for the Premier and Minister of Agriculture and Food. The House recently sent the local food bill, Bill 36, on to committee for further study. There are many constituents within my riding of Oakville who are truly pleased with the bill, and they’re very pleased with the support it received from all three parties in this House. The proposed local food bill is understood to be a part of a broader local food strategy, one that’s going to encourage and support agricultural communities, producers and processes right throughout this province.

There’s one question that I have, however, as to how we gauge the success of this proposed bill and how we are to measure the growth and improvement without creating that standard. Speaker, could the minister and Premier speak to the reasons why specific targets were not included in this bill?

1130

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I want to thank the member from Oakville for his question. The local food bill is indeed part of a comprehensive local food strategy and will involve a contribution of \$30 million, which was included in our budget—should the budget pass—to provide for the kind of profiling of local food, the kind of public education, and particularly the creation of a positive framework for collaboration among communities, within communities, and all of the producers and processors across the province who are involved in this \$34-billion industry. This is a huge industry, and it contributes more than 700,000 jobs to the economy of Ontario.

We’re committed to working with municipalities, working with the sector to make sure that we put in place those targets, those aspirational goals to make sure that we do everything we can to advance the cause of local food across the province.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: Thank you, Premier, for that answer. I understand that encouraging and supporting the local food sector is a province-wide responsibility that’s really popular in my riding of Oakville because it’s one that incorporates into the broader strategy of our

local food bill and something that MPPs such as myself and others in this House can go out and promote in our own communities, even if they’re not agricultural communities.

However, there’s always more that we can do in supporting local processors and producers. So would the minister and Premier please update the House on what more we can do to integrate and boost the presence of Ontario-grown food, as well as raise awareness about the importance of local food in all constituencies in Ontario?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I just want to speak to the point that the member from Oakville raises about his constituents. From my perspective, this issue of local food and the supporting of the agri-food business across the province is not an urban issue, it’s not a rural issue, it’s not a small-town or a large-town issue. It is an issue for all of us across the province. We all have an interest in making sure that the agri-food business in Ontario is as strong as it can be and that we all have access to the great local food that is grown in Ontario.

Following question period last Thursday, I joined a lot of my colleagues from the House on the lawn of Queen’s Park for the annual farmers’ market. I issued an MPP challenge to spread the word, increase the awareness of local food and buying local. So I hope that everyone will visit local farms, food processors, get into the communities and find local, buy local, pick local—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. New question.

USER FEES

Ms. Laurie Scott: My question is for the Minister of Natural Resources. In the treasury board document referenced by my leader in his question to the finance minister, it clearly lists a number of user fees which MNR is considering, such as fish and wildlife licence processing fees, fees for hunter education exams and manuals, and significant increases in commercial fishing licence fees—all of these, of course, designed to help this government pay for its out-of-control spending programs. Would the minister assure the hundreds of thousands of anglers and hunters of Ontario that he will not permit these fees to be implemented?

Hon. David Orazietti: I thank the member opposite for the question, and I’m pleased to respond. Obviously we’ve had some discussion about this this morning. These were proposals; they’re not in the budget. The finance minister has indicated that very, very clearly. The ministry is not proposing to increase these fees.

You’re aware that we’ve had consultation over the last number of years on this issue, and there have been slight increases going forward each and every year. We’ve done that in discussions with the OFAH, with NOTO and the Ministry of Tourism. There was an increase in January. That amount was 50 cents on licence fees. There were and have been over the past number of years small increases, but proposals going forward will be done only with broad consultation from stakeholders.

Ms. Laurie Scott: I'll take that as a no, so that's good.

I have another question. The treasury board document also proposed increased fees for the users of provincial parks and a crown land rental fee for private recreation camps of 5%. Considering the challenges which Ontario's tourist industry has faced in recent years, can you please assure this House that you will not support any additional fees which could further hurt Ontario tourism at a time when we could need to do everything we can to support that industry?

Hon. David Orazietti: As part of our ministry's modernization efforts, we are making significant transformation with respect to various approvals and processes as well as fees and permits. But in each instance, there has been broad consultation around this.

With respect to our parks, we certainly value the opportunity to review the parks model. We have 334 parks in the province of Ontario and 107 operating parks. We have had some small increases in park fees, but again, that speaks to the calibre and the quality of parks that we enjoy in the province of Ontario for the millions of visitors that visit our particular parks.

I'd say to the member opposite that we'll continue the dialogue, and only with public discussion will those fees be changed.

TENANT PROTECTION

Ms. Cindy Forster: My question is for the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. Rents are unaffordable for many Ontario families. Almost half of renters pay more than one third of their pre-tax income on rent. We have rent regulations that limit annual rent increases to the rate of inflation, but due to a loophole in the current law, tens of thousands of Ontario renters living in apartments or condos built after 1991 are not protected by rent regulations.

When will the minister close this loophole and ensure that all tenants are protected from double-digit rent hikes?

Hon. Linda Jeffrey: I want to thank the member for the question. I think we, as a government, have a good record of consistently showing a commitment to protecting tenants across Ontario, because we know that stability in rent prices is so important. It's vital for tenants. That's why we brought through the Residential Tenancies Act back in 2006, because we wanted to provide tenants and landlords with a strong and balanced piece of protection while fostering a robust rental market.

The rental buildings built or first occupied after 1991 in November are exempt from most rent caps. These tenants are not without protection, such as allowing only one increase per year, which requires a 90-day written notice. We also established the Landlord and Tenant Board. This is an independent body with the authority to deal fairly with disputes between landlords and tenants.

We also eliminated automatic evictions, allowing all tenants facing eviction an opportunity to get a fair hearing, because we believe strongly in balancing protection

of tenants with the encouragement of creating new rental opportunities across Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary

Ms. Cindy Forster: Last year the government passed legislation capping annual rent increases at 2.5%. The NDP supported this legislation. But this law does nothing to help the growing number of people renting condominiums built after 1991, particularly here in Toronto and other urban areas. Some of those people are experiencing rent hikes of 10% to 15% or more.

Why won't the minister commit to removing this outdated loophole and ensure that all renters are protected from arbitrary rent hikes?

Hon. Linda Jeffrey: Thank you again for the question. As I stated earlier, the rent cap exemption was introduced and it was maintained as an incentive for private landlords to build new rental accommodation in communities across Ontario. Changing this incentive would have an adverse effect on the rental housing sector, the economy and job creation, as it helps to create new rental housing stock and encourages the creation of jobs in the construction sector.

Any changes to the Residential Tenancies Act would require that we seek consultation with all affected parties, because it would have a significant impact across the province.

We work really hard to protect renters and anyone interested in rental accommodation across Ontario. Obviously, we'll work with all of our stakeholders, because we want the most robust sector going forward.

USE OF QUESTION PERIOD

Mr. Jerry J. Ouellette: Point of order.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Oshawa on a point of order.

Mr. Jerry J. Ouellette: Speaker, earlier during question period, the member from Glengarry-Prescott-Russell asked the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs a question, and quite frankly, the minister's answer would amount to a ministerial announcement or statement. The practice of this Legislature is that such announcements are better to be made during ministerial statements, and I would ask for your ruling and direct as required.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Oshawa does have a valid point in his point of order. The appropriate place for ministerial statements is in ministerial statements and not in question period.

That being said, the Speaker is usually not in a position at all times to know what is new policy or what is a statement on a policy. Therefore, I would remind all ministers that the appropriate place to make a statement that is new on policy is in ministerial statements for a response to be provided by the opposition. I would ask the ministers to fulfill that.

Having said that, I would also like to remind the member from Willowdale: If it's not a nervous tic, I would ask him to refrain from whistling.

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The Premier on a point of order.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd beg the indulgence of the House: They are not present but I know they are watching. It is my parents' 61st wedding anniversary today. I just want to wish Mum and Dad a happy anniversary.

INTRODUCTION OF LEGISLATION

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Newmarket–Aurora on a point or order.

Mr. Frank Klees: Speaker, in today's clippings there's an article in the Globe that refers to the fact that the Attorney General will announce legislation today at an event at the University of Toronto's law school. Then it goes on to say that the bill will be formally introduced in the Legislature this afternoon.

Once again, my point here is simply this: It would have been much more appropriate for legislation to be introduced here and then the minister makes his announcement wherever he chooses to do so. I think this is really, quite frankly, a disregard and disrespect for this Legislature, and I would ask you to rule on that.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Hopefully to confirm what I already knew, I'm going to remind the ministers that indeed it is the tradition and the convention of this place that anything new be introduced to the House first. That being said, there have been many occasions over the decades when that has not happened. I would also use it as a reminder—and I thank the member for providing that reminder—to all ministers that this is the place in which we introduce our first policies.

There are no deferred votes. This House stands recessed until 3 p.m.

The House recessed from 1142 to 1500.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

PHYSIOTHERAPY SERVICES

Mrs. Christine Elliott: On behalf of our leader, Tim Hudak, and the PC caucus, I would like to express our serious concerns with respect to the changes to physiotherapy services in Ontario being brought forward by the Minister of Health. These changes, which will result in a reduction of \$44 million from the physiotherapy budget, are being brought forward without consultation with front-line service providers: the designated physiotherapy clinics, the Long Term Care Association and the Retirement Communities Association. Even the LHINs and the CCACs who have been tasked with the implementation of these changes have not been consulted.

Mr. Speaker, these changes will have a serious detrimental effect on Ontario's seniors. It is a short-sighted attempt to save money without considering longer-term

consequences or the ministry's stated intention to keep seniors as well as possible for as long as possible.

Unintended consequences will include hospitalizations and far higher costs of care as a result of falls and loss of mobility. Seniors living in long-term-care homes will require greater assistance, requiring higher levels of staffing, which, as we all know, probably won't happen.

These changes are scheduled to become effective as of August 1, 2013. We've heard from many organizations, particularly retirement homes, that they simply don't have the time to put in place replacement programs before that time, which will result in an interruption of service to our senior clients.

It's incumbent on this government to stop these changes and to engage in meaningful consultation before moving forward.

MILES NADAL JEWISH COMMUNITY CENTRE

Mr. Rosario Marchese: It is my great pleasure to recognize an important milestone for the Miles Nadal Jewish Community Centre.

Sixty years ago, the Jewish Y opened its doors at Bloor and Spadina, and for six decades the JCC has served as a centre for Jewish life in downtown Toronto.

What began as an athletic association has expanded to include a daycare centre, a theatre, classrooms, and programming for everyone, from the youngest to the oldest.

Miles Nadal recently wrote, "We dreamed of a place ... that symbolized the evolution of the Jewish community and was also a community centre for the broader population living in the downtown core—a centre where the walls virtually breathed with sights and sounds and smells, where new memories would be created and old ones rekindled."

I would like to thank Mr. Nadal and all the supporters of the JCC, as well as the JCC staff and directors, for all their hard work and dedication. They have nurtured a place where the community, Jewish and non-Jewish, truly belongs.

Congratulations on 60 wonderful years.

NORTHERN ONTARIO HERITAGE FUND

Mr. Bill Mauro: Last week in my riding of Thunder Bay–Atikokan, Speaker, I had a wonderful announcement out in the village of Murillo, in one of my rural municipalities called Oliver Paipoonge.

Speaker, for the last 10 years, we've done a wonderful job supporting the small, rural, northern communities in Ontario, including those in my riding: Oliver Paipoonge, Neebing, Conmee, O'Connor, Gillies and Atikokan.

Last week in Murillo, in Oliver Paipoonge, I was very pleased to be there with Mayor Lucy Kloosterhuis and Councillors Jim Byers and Allan Vis. We were in the Murillo town hall for a terrific announcement of \$534,000 from the Northern Ontario Heritage Fund—a fund that, as Liberals, we're very proud of. We've taken

that fund from \$60 million up to \$100 million annually. Through that fund, we're able to do great work supporting business growth in northern communities.

Last week's announcement, Speaker, is going to help Oliver Paipoonge expand the Rubin Business Park—they have one phase 1 there that's already jammed up and full. This is going to help them to expand the park to provide 10 or 11 more lots.

In these small rural municipalities, it's very important that we help them to attract businesses to relieve some of the pressure that is foisted onto the back of the residential property tax base only. They have large geographic bases, relatively small populations, and the property tax base has to support most of that. The businesses that can come into those communities will help in that regard. So it's a great announcement on a bunch of different levels.

LYDIA ADAMS

Ms. Sylvia Jones: I'm pleased to rise today to recognize a Caledon resident who was recently listed as a finalist in the arts category for the 2013 Premier's Awards for Excellence in the Arts.

Lydia Adams has made a career of promoting choral music. As a child of a piano teacher, Lydia grew up in a household surrounded by music, and that foundation has been carried out throughout her life.

She has risen to the rank of conductor and artistic director for both the Amadeus Choir and the Elmer Iseler Singers, two internationally renowned and award-winning Canadian performing groups. With Lydia at the helm, both groups travel extensively, sharing their voices and the gift of the music with audiences both here and abroad.

As an ambassador for the Ontario branch of the Canadian Music Centre, Lydia is celebrated in her field as a leader in the advancement and promotion of Canadian choral music. In an interview earlier this year, Lydia described music as building connections and the importance that music plays in bringing people together. I couldn't agree more, and we are fortunate to have a talented, dedicated individual like Lydia who believes that Canadian music should be celebrated.

On behalf of the residents of Dufferin–Caledon, it is a pleasure for me to congratulate Lydia on being selected as a finalist, and I wish her the best of luck when the Premier's Awards for Excellence in the Arts final selections are revealed on June 27.

Lydia, thank you for sharing your talent and bringing the gift of music alive for audience members now and in the past.

HISTOIRE D'ORLÉANS

Mr. Phil McNeely: Today marks the 400th anniversary of Champlain's first trip up the Ottawa River, past Orléans in Ottawa.

Aujourd'hui représente un moment historique pour les francophones de ma circonscription, Ottawa–Orléans. Il y a 400 ans, le 4 juin 1613, Samuel de Champlain

entreprendait son grand voyage et passait le long des abords de la rivière des Outaouais à la hauteur de l'Île Petrie à Orléans. Les francophones d'Ottawa–Orléans, de l'est d'Ottawa et de la région de la capitale nationale sont présentement réunis à l'Île Petrie pour fêter 400 ans de présence francophone.

J'ai annoncé d'ailleurs, le 31 mai dernier, une aide financière de 25 000 \$ du gouvernement de l'Ontario via la Fondation Trillium de l'Ontario à la Société franco-ontarienne du patrimoine et de l'histoire d'Orléans. Cette subvention permet donc à la société de répondre à son mandat, qui est de promouvoir et de protéger le patrimoine et l'histoire d'Orléans.

J'aimerais remercier la présidente de la société, M^{me} Nicole Fortier, et toute son équipe pour leur initiative et leur dévouement afin de souligner et de célébrer en grand les 400 ans du passage de Champlain à Orléans.

Je profite donc de l'occasion pour vous inviter à aller célébrer cette journée historique à l'Île Petrie aujourd'hui. On vous y attend en très grand nombre.

HFI PYROTECHNICS

Mr. Steve Clark: Ontario's economy has had a rough ride on this government's watch. We know times remain tough, especially in the manufacturing sector. That's why it's a pleasure today to celebrate a business success story in my riding of Leeds–Grenville.

Last week, HFI Pyrotechnics in Edwardsburgh/Cardinal township announced it won a \$12.4-million contract to supply the US Navy with search-and-rescue marine location markers. These pyrotechnic devices—a new product line developed by the company—are used in life-and-death situations involving man-overboard rescues, target identification and anti-submarine warfare. It's a point of great pride to everyone in Leeds–Grenville that a company was selected locally by the US Navy to supply these critical devices.

This contract is a clear signal that HFI Pyrotechnics, a company founded in 1873, remains at the leading edge of this unique industry. In fact, HFI is the last company of its kind in Canada. I'm looking forward to visiting the plant this summer and personally congratulating everyone involved in this remarkable success story.

1510

Securing this contract with the US military was the conclusion of an ambitious four-year strategic process by HFI to position itself to succeed. It's a tremendous accomplishment. I want to commend the leadership team, president and CEO John Witherspoon, and the hard-working staff of 43 skilled employees.

I'm confident this breakthrough into the US market and the continuing innovation at HFI will help them secure more international contracts as its reputation in the military pyrotechnics business grows.

HEALTH CARE

M^{me} France Gélinas: The Liberal government of Premier Wynne is making many cuts to our health care

system, so let me tell you what my day was like today as health critic for the NDP.

At 8:30 this morning, I joined 200 physiotherapists for breakfast. They were here to speak out against the cuts to physiotherapy for seniors living in retirement homes. On August 1 this year, tens of thousands of seniors presently receiving physiotherapy in their retirement homes will be discharged to nothing—no follow-up, no more physio.

At 9, I met with Diane from the Dystonia Society, Bev from the Huntington Society and Vanessa from the Parkinson Society. They wanted me to help them stop the funding cuts to the Centre for Movement Disorders located in Markham, which 2,500 people with Dystonia, Huntington's disease and Parkinson's have been using for the last 11 years. This interdisciplinary centre's best practices are being copied elsewhere in Canada, but it is being closed here in Ontario due to funding cuts.

Then, I met with Deborah Simon of the Ontario Community Support Association. They represent community support services such as Meals on Wheels, home support, not-for-profit home care. They are also forced to cut services due to funding cuts.

Then, a busload of people came in to protest the cuts to small rural and northern hospitals that the Liberal government has forced upon their communities.

This is a lot of funding cuts to health care for one day, and this is only one day as the health critic for the NDP.

MALVERN BIKE RACE

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: Mr. Speaker, on Saturday, June 1, I attended the sixth annual Malvern Bike Race hosted by Toronto Police Service, 42 division, along with the Ontario Cycling Association and numerous community volunteers. Ten school teams totalling 120 children from the Scarborough area competed for the George Terry Cup through a series of bicycle races. Each team spent 12 weeks working with their coach, who is a police officer. Together, they trained at an indoor 90,000-square-foot bike facility called Joyride 150 in preparation for the Malvern race.

This event, sponsored by the Canadian Tire Jumpstart program and ProAction Cops and Kids, donated a brand new bicycle and helmet to each participant to use during the race, which they were able to keep.

Youth between the ages of 13 and 17 had the opportunity to experience the speed and thrill of an organized bicycle road race, professionally timed and overseen by the Ontario Cycling Association.

It is also an opportunity for police officers to interact with local youth on a one-to-one level in a fun and informal setting. Chief Blair attended the event and helped cheer the kids on and assisted in the closing ceremonies and award presentation.

Mr. Speaker, this event has such a positive impact on the kids in the community, and I want to thank the sponsors and especially everyone involved in organizing the annual Malvern Bike Race.

GREEN POWER GENERATION

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: I rise today regarding an issue I've raised many times in this House. It's important to my constituents in Huron-Bruce and people across Ontario.

Last Thursday, the Minister of Energy made an announcement concerning changes to the Green Energy Act in Niagara Falls. A London Free Press article that day quoted the minister as saying, "Communities spoke, mayors spoke, and we listened."

Well, Minister, with all due respect, I don't think you have listened closely enough, and you certainly haven't listened to the municipalities in my riding.

I want to quote to you April Jeffs, the mayor of Wainfleet, in the Welland Tribune:

"We knew it wasn't going to be ideal, but I thought we were going to be able to take away something away from this.

"From what I'm hearing, we'll get nothing....

"For us, I'm hugely disappointed ... absolutely nothing" the minister "said will have any impact...."

I think that says it all.

Were municipalities even consulted by this government before this announcement was made on Thursday? I think not. And what is "more say"? We need that defined. Municipalities deserve to know.

I have to agree with many municipalities, since that announcement, who see this as nothing but a green wash. This does nothing to address the changing protocols or the many concerns that communities living within or facing unwanted industrial wind turbines are facing. Frankly, Minister, this is a huge disappointment for municipal leaders, communities, myself and my colleagues in the Ontario PC Party. I expected and had hoped for more.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

Mr. Norm Miller: Mr. Speaker, I beg leave to present a report from the Standing Committee on Public Accounts and move its adoption.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Mr. Miller presents the committee's report and moves its adoption. Does the member wish to make a brief statement?

Mr. Norm Miller: Yes, thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to make a statement.

The committee has been hard at work since March of last year. It has dealt with a tremendous volume of information, so I'd like to start by thanking Clerk William Short for all his hard work, and procedural services assistant Jennifer Ashworth for all the hard work they've done, as well as research officer Ray McLellan, Hansard and translation for the great work they've done.

The Standing Committee on Public Accounts held hearings on the Auditor General's March 2012 special report. During 2012, there were 17 meetings between March and September, with 61 witnesses. To date in 2013, the committee has held nine meetings and heard from 21 witnesses. It is the committee's intention to table two interim reports: an initial report—which I'm reporting today—for the 2012 hearings and a second report for the 2013 hearings, with committee recommendations to be addressed in the final report.

I would also like to take this opportunity to thank the permanent membership of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts, and that consists of Toby Barrett, who's the Vice-Chair; Dipika Damerla; France Gélinas; Helena Jaczek; Phil McNeely, Frank Klees, who has been substituting for Jerry Ouellette; Shafiq Qaadri and Jagmeet Singh.

On behalf of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts, I'm pleased to table interim report number 1 on the Auditor General's 2012 Special Report on Ornge Air Ambulance and Related Services. Committee members from all parties have worked together to prepare this unanimous report.

There were many areas of concern that have been brought out in this report. In fact, there are a total of 14 that have been highlighted. I won't go through all 14, but we grouped them in four thematic areas as follows: the appropriateness of Ornge's business model; the compliance with the performance agreements and legislation; challenges evident in Ornge's management and operation of the not-for-profit and for-profit entities in the Ornge family of companies; and public confidence in the management of provincial and corporate finances.

The committee's fundamental focus throughout these hearings continues to be the extent to which Ornge did or did not conduct its business in a transparent and accountable manner, and whether it provided Ontario patients with value for money in the delivery of medical services.

I would like to acknowledge the dedication of Ornge personnel, who have operated in a challenging environment over the past few years. We would like to express our appreciation to Ornge for its commitment to providing ambulance service to Ontarians.

I would also like to use this opportunity to express condolences on the four people killed in the helicopter crash in Moosonee last week: that is, specifically, Captain Don Filliter, First Officer Jacques Dupuy, paramedic Dustin Dagenais and paramedic Chris Snowball—

Interjection.

Mr. Norm Miller: —Dagenais; thank you for that, Mr. Bisson—and to say that our thoughts are with the families and friends of those people.

I would like to move adjournment of the debate.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Mr. Miller moves adjournment of the debate. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Debate adjourned.

1520

STANDING COMMITTEE ON ESTIMATES

Mr. Michael Prue: I beg leave to present a report from the Standing Committee on Estimates on the estimates selected and those not selected by the standing committee for consideration.

The Clerk-at-the-Table (Ms. Tonia Gramann): Mr. Prue from the Standing Committee on Estimates presents the committee's report as follows:

Pursuant to standing order 60, your committee has selected the estimates 2013-14 of the following ministries and offices for consideration: Ministry of Finance, 10 hours; Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport, five hours; Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care, seven hours, 30 minutes; Ministry of Transportation, seven hours, 30 minutes; Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs, 15 hours; Ministry of Energy, seven hours, 30 minutes; Ministry of Education, seven hours, 30 minutes; Ministry of Infrastructure, seven hours, 30 minutes; Ministry of Infrastructure, seven hours, 30 minutes; Ministry of Children and Youth Services, seven hours, 30 minutes; Office of Francophone Affairs, seven hours, 30 minutes; Ministry of Consumer Services—

Interjections: Dispense.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Dispense? Agreed.

Pursuant to standing order 61(b), the report of the committee is deemed to be received, and the estimates of the ministries and the offices named therein as not being selected for consideration are deemed to be concurred in.

Report deemed received.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

RESIDENTIAL TENANCIES AMENDMENT ACT (RULES RELATING TO RENT INCREASES), 2013 LOI DE 2013 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LA LOCATION À USAGE D'HABITATION (RÈGLES RELATIVES AUX AUGMENTATIONS DE LOYER)

Ms. Forster moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 82, An Act to amend the Residential Tenancies Act, 2006 to extend rules governing rent increases to certain types of rental units / Projet de loi 82, Loi modifiant la Loi de 2006 sur la location à usage d'habitation afin d'étendre les règles régissant les augmentations de loyer à certains types de logements locatifs.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member for a short statement.

Ms. Cindy Forster: This bill amends the Residential Tenancies Act, 2006. Currently, various categories of properties—rental units that were not occupied for any purposes before June 17, 1998; rental units, no part of which was previously rented since July 29, 1975; and rental units in buildings, mobile home parks and land-lease communities, no part of which was occupied for residential purposes before November 1, 1991—are exempted from rules governing rent increases. This bill removes those exemptions.

PROTECTION OF PUBLIC PARTICIPATION ACT, 2013

LOI DE 2013 SUR LA PROTECTION DU DROIT À LA PARTICIPATION AUX AFFAIRES PUBLIQUES

Mr. Gerretsen moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 83, An Act to amend the Courts of Justice Act, the Libel and Slander Act and the Statutory Powers Procedure Act in order to protect expression on matters of public interest / Projet de loi 83, Loi modifiant la Loi sur les tribunaux judiciaires, la Loi sur la diffamation et la Loi sur l'exercice des compétences légales afin de protéger l'expression sur les affaires d'intérêt public.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member for a short statement?

Hon. John Gerretsen: I'll wait until ministerial statements, Speaker.

MOTIONS

HOUSE SITTINGS

Hon. John Milloy: I move that, pursuant to standing order 6(c)(i), the House shall meet from 6:45 p.m. to 9:30 p.m. today, Tuesday, June 4, 2013.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Mr. Milloy has moved government notice of motion number 8. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I heard a no.

All those opposed, say "nay."

I believe the nays have it.

Call in the members. This will be a five-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1525 to 1530.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Members take their seats, please.

All those in favour of the motion, please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

Albanese, Laura	Delaney, Bob	McMeekin, Ted
Balkissoon, Bas	Dhillon, Vic	McNeely, Phil
Bartolucci, Rick	Dickson, Joe	Meilleur, Madeleine
Berardinetti, Lorenzo	Duguid, Brad	Milloy, John

Bradley, James J.	Flynn, Kevin Daniel	Moridi, Reza
Broten, Laurel C.	Gerretsen, John	Murray, Glen R.
Cansfield, Donna H.	Hoskins, Eric	Naqvi, Yasir
Chan, Michael	Jaczek, Helena	Oraziotti, David
Chiarelli, Bob	Jeffrey, Linda	Piruzza, Teresa
Colle, Mike	Kwinter, Monte	Qaadri, Shafiq
Coteau, Michael	Leal, Jeff	Sandals, Liz
Crack, Grant	MacCharles, Tracy	Sergio, Mario
Craitor, Kim	Mangat, Amit	Wong, Soo
Damerla, Dipika	Matthews, Deborah	Wynne, Kathleen O.
Del Duca, Steven	Mauro, Bill	Zimmer, David

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): All those opposed to the motion, please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Nays

Armstrong, Teresa J.	Horwath, Andrea	Nicholls, Rick
Arnett, Ted	Hudak, Tim	O'Toole, John
Bailey, Robert	Jackson, Rod	Ouellette, Jerry J.
Barrett, Toby	Jones, Sylvia	Pettapiece, Randy
Bisson, Gilles	Klees, Frank	Prue, Michael
Campbell, Sarah	Leone, Rob	Schein, Jonah
Chudleigh, Ted	MacLaren, Jack	Scott, Laurie
Clark, Steve	MacLeod, Lisa	Shurman, Peter
DiNovo, Cheri	Mantha, Michael	Singh, Jagmeet
Dunlop, Garfield	Marchese, Rosario	Smith, Todd
Elliott, Christine	McDonell, Jim	Tabuns, Peter
Fedeli, Victor	McKenna, Jane	Taylor, Monique
Fife, Catherine	McNaughton, Monte	Thompson, Lisa M.
Forster, Cindy	Miller, Norm	Vanthof, John
Gélinas, France	Miller, Paul	Walker, Bill
Hardeman, Ernie	Miligan, Rob E.	Wilson, Jim
Harris, Michael	Munro, Julia	Yakabuski, John
Hillier, Randy	Natyshak, Taras	Yurek, Jeff

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 45; the nays are 54.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I declare the motion lost.

Motion negatived.

REPORT, INTEGRITY COMMISSIONER

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I beg to inform the House that I have laid upon the table a report from the Integrity Commissioner entitled Report of the Review of Expense Claims Covering the Period April 1, 2012, to March 31, 2013, Pursuant to the Cabinet Ministers' and Opposition Leaders' Expenses Review and Accountability Act, 2002.

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Hon. John Gerretsen: Before reading my statement, I'd like to recognize a number of people that are in the gallery who are witnessing the statement today. We have, first of all, Mr. Peter Downard and Mr. Brian MacLeod Rogers. They were both members of the anti-SLAPP advisory panel. We also have Patricia Marshall and her spouse, Tom Marshall. Patricia had started the earlier round table on anti-SLAPP legislation, and Tom used to

be the general counsel of MAG and is also heavily involved with the OBA, the Ontario Bar Association.

With them are Ben Rogers, Anita Moreira and Claire Downard, who's the daughter of Peter Downard. Also, from the justice policy division of the Ministry of the Attorney General, we have Melissa Kim, Janet Chow, Florence Lau and, finally, we have David Donnelly. They're all joining us in the gallery today, Speaker.

I rise in the House today to introduce legislation that would, if passed, defend public expression and encourage open debate on matters of public interest.

I think all members will agree that one of the greatest things about living in a fair and democratic society like Ontario's is that we can speak out on matters that are important to us, sometimes having a difference in opinion and issues that we express from time to time.

Our government is committed to building a fair society, Speaker, where everyone has the opportunity to participate and benefit from Ontario's prosperity and our great quality of life. We know that a democratic society is stronger when citizens are free and empowered to participate in it more fully and when they have access to the services and supports that make these contributions possible.

A citizen's confidence in their justice system and their willingness and ability to participate in a democratic society are inextricably linked. Ontario has a good system of administration of justice and a good court system, but it's not perfect. There's no question that litigation is expensive and matters can take too long to be resolved.

Speaker, strategic lawsuits are relatively new here in Ontario. Three years ago, my predecessor, Chris Bentley, convened an expert panel to study the issue and recommend the most effective way to address it. The advisory panel was chaired by Mayo Moran, dean of the University of Toronto's law school, and included Brian MacLeod Rogers, a media lawyer and adjunct professor at the Ryerson School of Journalism, and Peter Downard, an expert in defamation law and a partner with Fasken Martineau here in Toronto. Again, I would like to welcome both Mr. Rogers and Mr. Downard to the House today.

After extensive consultation, the panel produced a report that is reflected in the bill you see before you, Speaker.

I would also like to recognize the tremendous work on this bill by John Gregory, general counsel of the justice policy branch of the Ministry of the Attorney General, who was ably assisted by Andrea Strom and their entire legal team.

As its name suggests, this bill will help protect the freedom of every Ontarian to voice their opinions in good faith and participate in open debate on matters of public interest. This is truly a made-in-Ontario solution that will balance the protection of public participation and freedom of expression with the protection of reputation and economic interest.

The centerpiece of this proposal is a fast-track review process for lawsuits alleged to be strategic in nature. The

legislation provides that a party that believes it has been sued in a strategic lawsuit can file a motion to have the suit dismissed. Within 60 days, the court would apply a legal test to determine whether or not the suit should be allowed to proceed.

The test would be composed of the following three steps. The defendant in the main lawsuit would have to show that the lawsuit arose because of the defendant's expression on a matter of public interest. If that is so, then the plaintiff would have to show that it has a substantial chance of success and that the defendant did not likely have a good defence. If the plaintiff can show that, then the court would consider whether the harm suffered or potentially suffered by the plaintiff was more important than the continuation of the public discussion of the matter of public interest involved in the case. Where the plaintiff has suffered little harm, the case would be dismissed, but where the harm is more serious, the case would be allowed to continue.

1540

In applying the test, the courts would seek to balance the interests at stake, with an eye not only on the technical merits of the plaintiff's case but the value of free expression on matters of public interest. Where the plaintiff is likely to suffer serious harm, as I mentioned before, the case would continue. If, however, little or no harm is likely, then the technical merits of the case would yield to the value of public democratic debate, and the suit would be dismissed.

The bill would also amend the Libel and Slander Act to add a section which states that any qualified privilege that applies in respect of an oral or written communication on a matter of public interest between two or more persons who have a direct interest in the matter applies regardless of whether or not the communication is witnessed or reported on by a media representative.

The bill would also amend a section of the Statutory Powers Procedure Act to provide that submissions for a costs order in a proceeding must be in writing, unless a tribunal determines that to do so is likely to cause a party to the proceeding significant prejudice. This would primarily apply in administrative tribunals.

This bill truly deserves the support of all sides of the House, because it speaks to one of our most cherished values as citizens of the province, and that is the ability to speak out on any issue without threat of a reprisal. Mr. Speaker, I urge all of my colleagues in the House to support this progressive legislation.

ABORIGINAL HERITAGE

Hon. David Zimmer: I wish to recognize First Nation and Métis peoples and Inuit in Ontario and acknowledge the traditional territory of the Mississaugas of the New Credit; that's the territory in which this Legislature is situated.

I rise in the Legislature today to acknowledge that June is National Aboriginal History Month and that Friday, June 21, is National Aboriginal Day.

The stories of aboriginal peoples in Ontario and in this country are rich with history, contributions and perspectives of the first peoples. During the month of June, we welcome all Ontarians to celebrate and learn these stories and raise the level of awareness and appreciation of aboriginal heritage.

This year will mark the 250th anniversary of the Royal Proclamation of 1763. It was a milestone agreement between the First Nations and the British settlers, an agreement that protected First Nations' possession and use of their hunting grounds, including lands that are today in Ontario. The Royal Proclamation of 1763 remains significant today because it is the foundation of the treaty relationships that make Canada so distinctive.

What many Ontarians may not realize is that they likely live in an area covered by a treaty. We are all treaty people.

It is also important to acknowledge that the relationship between the aboriginal and non-aboriginal peoples in this country has had its challenges since those promising beginnings in 1763. Many of these challenges still exist today for the more than 300,000 aboriginal people in Ontario.

There is a significant graduation gap between aboriginal and non-aboriginal students. Unemployment rates among aboriginal peoples are twice the Ontario average and can be several times higher in remote communities. The rates of addiction, mental health issues and suicide among aboriginal youth are much higher than the general population.

I have visited numerous First Nation communities and met with aboriginal leaders to better understand these issues, hear their concerns and work together on developing a way forward. Two weeks ago, I visited Pikangikum First Nation and met with Chief Dean Owen. While there are challenges, there is also an unrelenting spirit and an unwavering hope within their community. By working in partnership with aboriginal communities and service providers, our government is making progress to address these issues.

For example, in February we worked with First Nation communities to improve access to care and community supports for those addicted to prescription narcotics. In April, the Nishnawbe Aski Nation, Canada and Ontario signed a historic memorandum of understanding to support NAN students in reaching their full potential.

We reinforced our commitment to supporting aboriginal peoples in the 2013 budget. The budget included an additional \$5 million in funding to improve aboriginal student achievement. We have also recently established an urban aboriginal policy engagement table to improve the social conditions and outcomes for aboriginal people in urban communities.

It is our responsibility as a government and, I would suggest, the responsibility of all Ontarians to better understand our relationship with the First Nation, Inuit and Métis peoples. That is why I am thrilled to have the opportunity to talk about National Aboriginal History Month and National Aboriginal Day. I believe a better

understanding of the contributions of aboriginal peoples will build a stronger relationship with non-aboriginal Ontarians.

This month, there are numerous opportunities to celebrate the outstanding achievements of aboriginal peoples. For example, today is Tom Longboat Day, providing an opportunity to learn about one of the world's greatest long-distance runners.

Across Ontario, there are a number of tourism destinations and special events where all Ontarians are welcome to attend and learn more about aboriginal history and culture, and their unique perspectives. For example, on National Aboriginal Day, the Timmins Native Friendship Centre will hold its grand opening. From June 21 to June 23, the Summer Solstice Aboriginal Arts Festival and Competition Pow Wow takes place in Ottawa. On June 26, the Native Canadian Centre of Toronto is holding its celebration of National Aboriginal History Month in Yonge-Dundas Square.

Ontarians can visit the Ontario Travel website or follow my ministry on Twitter to find out more about how we are getting involved in some of the great events happening all over Ontario in recognition of National Aboriginal History Month and National Aboriginal Day.

National Aboriginal History Month and National Aboriginal Day are perfect opportunities for all of us—all Ontarians—to strengthen these relationships through awareness and education of another community's perspective. Only then can we in Ontario be as fair and prosperous as we all have a right to be, aboriginal and non-aboriginal peoples.

As Minister of Aboriginal Affairs, I encourage all Ontarians to join me in celebrating the unique heritage and diverse cultures and outstanding achievements of First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples, during the month of June. Thank you. Meegwetch.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Statements by ministries?

It is now time for responses.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Ms. Sylvia Jones: It's an honour to rise on behalf of the PC caucus to respond to the minister's statement on the newly introduced Protection of Public Participation Act. It's unfortunate that we first learned of this act reading the *Globe and Mail* this morning. While I have not had a chance to yet formally review the legislation, I am eager to read it over and see how closely the legislation matches the proposals made in the advisory panel.

The concept behind SLAPPs—that stands for “strategic litigation against public participation”—is at its very core abnormal. I say that these cases are abnormal because typically when one party sues another, they do so with the intent of winning the lawsuit. Indeed, the very idea of suing someone while simultaneously having no interest in pursuing the lawsuit or in winning the case would seem odd to a great many people.

This does occur, however, and when it does, it is typically for the reason of intimidating others with hefty lawsuits in order to silence their opinions, hence the term SLAPP, because these lawsuits are strategic devices to discourage people from voicing their concerns, often on development projects in communities.

Basically, imagine a new residential tower is proposed. A community meeting is held, and a number of residents attend and voice their concerns. Well, if the hypothetical developer were to pursue a SLAPP, they would then sue each of the community members who spoke up at the meeting against the development for a large sum; it could even be for millions of dollars.

Usually these lawsuits are filed as a claim of defamation. While these cases are usually of little or no merit, they are often a tremendous burden on the defendants, who are now forced to hire lawyers and defend themselves. On the opposing side, however, the developer would have no interest in fighting the case, and the case would most likely be dropped before ever going to court. The intent would be achieved, because the concerned resident would most likely not be attending any more public meetings when the last one got them sued for \$5 million.

1550

Again, this is just a hypothetical example to illustrate my point that these lawsuits can be a real problem. So I'm pleased that the Attorney General has taken some action on this. Public participation is the foundation of a healthy democracy, and the reality is that people should not have to fear the threat of lawsuits to voice their concerns.

I'd be remiss if I didn't point out that the report, which I'm assuming informs the Protection of Public Participation Act, was actually submitted to the ministry three years ago, in 2010, so it has collected some dust. Nonetheless, I'm looking forward to reviewing the legislation introduced today, and discussing it with the minister and the affected stakeholders.

ABORIGINAL HERITAGE

Mr. Jerry J. Ouellette: National Aboriginal Day allows fellow Canadians to learn more about our Indian, Inuit and Métis peoples, their cultures, and their significant contributions to the growth and development of our country. National Aboriginal Day is held once again on June 21, the day of the summer solstice, a day that holds special significance for many aboriginal groups and cultures. As members on this side of the House, we too applaud and salute the First Nations of our country who have preserved their cultures, traditions, languages and way of life, despite many challenges.

Now another year has come and gone, and what has taken place? That's exactly what all are wondering. Nothing to strengthen that relationship. Nothing to improve circumstances among the First Nations people. In fact, conditions in First Nations communities are not improving. Education for our First Nations children is

falling further behind. This government has actually continued its divisive approach in negotiations and consultations.

As you probably know, Mr. Speaker, the government is currently engaged in the Algonquin land claim, a precedent-setting process that impacts an area of 8.9 million acres in southern Ontario. Last year at this time, I pointed out to the government that the land claim process was being undertaken secretly without any meaningful consultation with local authorities, residents or affected user groups. This does not build, but breaks down, relationships.

Mr. Speaker, I regret to inform you that not only has the process continued without any transparency; it has actually worsened. With the release of the draft agreement in principle last December, those directly influenced are now starting to become aware of the implications, and that they were not privy to any of the details prior to the release of the AIP.

Local residents, cottagers, hunt camp owners, municipalities, the hunting and fishing community, the tourism sector, and the forestry sector were not involved in the consultation process and are outraged at the agreement. Sadly, the government has continued holding closed meetings and negotiations, simply presenting general briefings with limited details to the interested stakeholders and jurisdictions. And this government even had the nerve to host its so-called public information sessions during March break, when nobody was around.

I ask again: What does it say about a government that boasts about its record of dealing with First Nations when we have secret negotiations causing further unrest, resentment and division between First Nations and non-aboriginal people in Ontario?

In order to move forward, we need a change in direction. We need to build trust amongst and between our nations. Only then will we build a better future for all our children. As a province, we must act and quit posturing over whose responsibility is what, but act for all and in the best interests of all Ontarians. Meegwetch.

ABORIGINAL HERITAGE

Ms. Sarah Campbell: June 21 is National Aboriginal Day across Canada. It is an honour to rise and recognize this important event on behalf of the NDP caucus.

National Aboriginal Day was created to celebrate the vital contributions of First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples, and the contributions they have made in developing a shared history. It is also a recognition of the partnership our ancestors created when they entered into treaties. Those treaties established a nation-to-nation relationship where both sides agreed to share our wealth, land and prosperity.

The partnership allowed this land we have come to call Canada and, more specifically, Ontario, to grow and thrive. We owe much of our prosperity to First Nations people who agreed to share the knowledge and wisdom that had been passed down to them from generation to

generation. Despite this acceptance and willingness to share the land, the relationship has not always been positive, and First Nations culture, language and identity have at times been threatened.

While we have recognized many of the wrongs in the past and have set out to heal them, there is much work that needs to be done, and can be done, to repair the relationship. It is my sincere hope that by continuing to mark National Aboriginal Day and by promoting First Nations culture, traditions and knowledge, we can continue to make progress.

Last National Aboriginal Day, I was honoured to join residents of Sioux Lookout and those living within the traditional area of Lac Seul First Nation as they signed a friendship accord recognizing their shared history and future, and that the path to success for all communities involves working together in a strong partnership. It was a truly inspiring event. I hope that more communities across the province recognize the crucial importance and the benefits of these partnerships and that they recognize that our mutual success lies in mutual understanding, co-operation and sharing.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Today I take great pride in rising on behalf of the NDP caucus and our leader, Andrea Horwath, in response to and support of the Attorney General's announcement of introducing the Protection of Public Participation Act.

Mr. Speaker, this is a vital, important piece of legislation. Just to put into context, SLAPPs are strategic lawsuits against public participation, and that's exactly what these lawsuits are used to do. Many community advocates, community activists and just members of the community who have a concern, try to voice that concern, try to raise their issue in a public forum, are silenced due to use of strategic lawsuits.

This is an affront to democracy. This is an affront to a free and democratic society. One of the pillars of our society is the right to dissent, the ability to stand up and say, "I do not agree with what's going on in my community." When this pillar of our society is threatened, that is a serious attack on all of our liberties. The fact that strategic lawsuits have been going on for so long is an affront to all of us.

I am very honoured that today I can stand and say that the NDP has been fighting for this for so many years. I can say that members from Davenport and from Parkdale-High Park have advocated for anti-SLAPP legislation. We have met with stakeholders. I, myself, as the critic for the Attorney General, have met with a number of stakeholders. Together, we have advocated for anti-SLAPP legislation for some time now. In fact, our leader—the leader of the NDP—introduced very similar anti-SLAPP legislation in 2008 and 2010.

This is an issue that has been on our radar. We've known about this issue and we've been pleading with this government to do something about it. We're very happy

that, though it has been three years since the 2010 anti-SLAPP advisory panel's recommendations, we are still very encouraged by the fact that the Attorney General has brought this forward now.

I hope that this legislation—I was unable to review it in its totality—includes three key ingredients. These three key ingredients are:

To protect the right to public participation, the anti-SLAPP legislation should include statutory provisions to explicitly guarantee this right. From my cursory perusing of the law, it does include this. This is one of the essential elements.

In addition, what the Attorney General spoke of, the early dismissal mechanism—that's essentially at the core of this legislation to provide a mechanism to dismiss these lawsuits out of hand in an expedient manner. That is clearly the most important part of this legislation.

Thirdly, SLAPP disincentives: There has to be a strong disincentive so that companies and organizations that discourage public discourse are met with some serious and strong repercussions and disincentives.

We must keep our voices loud. We must support public discourse and public dissent to protect our society.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I thank all members for their comments.

PETITIONS

PHYSIOTHERAPY SERVICES

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Knowing that yesterday I made the member from Durham feel real good, and knowing that he will only read the petition, the member from Durham will start us on petitions today.

Mr. John O'Toole: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario"—on my best behaviour:

"Whereas the Ministry of Health is planning on eliminating OHIP-funded physiotherapy services currently provided to seniors in retirement homes and changing the current provider of the service as of August 1st, 2013; and

"Whereas the Minister of Health has announced a total of \$33 million in physiotherapy funding, or \$550 per senior for 60,000 seniors, including those in retirement homes; and

"Whereas, instead of the 100 to 150 visits per year a senior may receive now from their dedicated on-site OHIP physiotherapy staff, the change would mean a CCAC therapist would provide 5 to 10 visits on-site only to seniors who are bedridden or have an acute injury. All other ambulatory seniors would have to attend other community locations/clinics for physiotherapy and exercise off-site; and

"Whereas this change not only reduces the amount of money available, but also moves funds from the lowest-

cost provider (OHIP physiotherapy providers—\$12.20 per treatment) to the highest-cost provider (CCAC—\$120 per treatment); and

“Whereas current OHIP physiotherapy providers, who have been providing seniors with individualized treatments for over 48 years, will be delisted from OHIP by the government; and

“Whereas these services have been proven to help seniors improve in their activities of daily living, mobility, pain and fall risks;

1600

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“To review and reverse the decision to eliminate OHIP physiotherapy services to seniors in retirement homes, our most vulnerable population and most at risk for falls; and continue with the provision of at least 100 treatments per year with a mechanism to access an additional 50 treatments, if medically necessary, with the current low-cost OHIP physiotherapy providers.”

I’m pleased to sign and support this and present it to Hannah, one of the pages.

EMPLOYMENT PRACTICES

Mr. Michael Prue: I have a petition that reads as follows:

“Whereas servers and bartenders in Ontario earn \$8.90 an hour, far less than the minimum wage; and

“Whereas tips are given to servers and bartenders for good service and to supplement the lower wages they receive; and

“Whereas Ontario law allows for owners and managers to pocket a portion of servers’ and bartenders’ earned tips or total sales; and

“Whereas thousands of servers across the province have asked for this practice to stop;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“Support the swift passage of Bill 49, An Act to amend the Employment Standards Act with respect to tips and other gratuities and thereby end the practice of ‘tip-outs’ to management and owners.”

I’m in agreement and will send it down with page Christine.

CHILD CUSTODY

Mr. Kim Craitor: I’m pleased to introduce the following petition, signed by many of the seniors from the Fort Erie seniors’ home, such as Lynda Smith or Ron Ferguson. The petition reads as follows:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the people of Ontario deserve and have the right to request an amendment to the Children’s Law Reform Act to emphasize the importance of children’s relationships with their grandparents as requested in Bill 48 put forward by” the MPP from Niagara Falls; and

“Whereas currently, subsection 21(1) of the act provides that a parent of a child or any other person may apply to a court for certain orders respecting custody or access to the child. An amendment to that subsection specifies that a grandparent may apply for such an order; and

“Whereas currently subclause 24(2)(a)(i) of the act provides that where a court makes a determination relating to certain applications in respect of custody of or access to a child, the court shall consider, among other things, the love, affection and emotional ties between the child and each person entitled to or claiming custody of or access to the child. An amendment to that subclause specifies that this includes grandparents; and

“Whereas relationships between children and grandparents are a special bond that should be maintained;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to amend the Children’s Law Reform Act to emphasize the importance of children’s relationships with their grandparents.”

It has been eight years. Let’s pass the bill.

FISHING REGULATIONS

Mr. Jerry J. Ouellette: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“Whereas the Ontario Fishing Regulations Summary is printed each year by the Ministry of Natural Resources and distributed to recreational fishermen throughout the province to inform them of all the relevant seasons, limits, licence requirements and other regulations; and

“Whereas this valuable document is readily available for anglers to keep in their residence, cottage, truck, boat, trailer or on their person to be fully informed of the current fishing regulations; and

“Whereas MNR recently and abruptly drastically reduced the distribution of the Ontario Fishing Regulations Summary such that even major licence issuers and large fishing retailers are limited to one copy of regulations per outlet; and

“Whereas anglers do not always have access to the Internet to view online regulations while travelling or in remote areas;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to immediately return the production of the Ontario Fishing Regulations Summary to previous years’ quantities such that all anglers have access to a copy and to distribute them accordingly.”

I affix my signature in full support.

PHYSIOTHERAPY SERVICES

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the Ministry of Health is planning on eliminating physiotherapy services currently provided to seniors in retirement homes—and changing the current provider of the service as of August 1st, 2013; and

"Whereas the Minister of Health has announced a total of \$33 million in physiotherapy funding, or \$550 per senior, for 60,000 seniors, including those in retirement homes; and

"Whereas instead of the 100 to 150 visits per year a senior may receive now from their dedicated on-site OHIP physiotherapy staff, the change would mean a CCAC therapist would provide 5 to 10 visits on-site only to seniors who are bedridden or have an acute injury. All other ambulatory seniors would have to attend other community locations/clinics for physiotherapy and exercise off-site; and

"Whereas this change not only reduces the amount of money available, but also moves funds from the lowest-cost provider (OHIP physiotherapy providers—\$12.20 per treatment) to the highest-cost provider (CCAC—\$120 per treatment); and

"Whereas current OHIP physiotherapy providers, who have been providing seniors with individualized treatments for over 48 years, will be delisted from OHIP by the government; and

"Whereas these services have been proven to help seniors improve in their activities of daily living, mobility, pain and falls risk;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To review and reverse the decision to eliminate OHIP physiotherapy services to seniors in retirement homes, our most vulnerable population and most at risk for falls; and continue with the provision of at least 100 treatments per year with the current low-cost OHIP physiotherapy providers."

I sign this petition and I deliver it to a page.

PHYSIOTHERAPY SERVICES

Mr. Jim Wilson: These petitions—signed by thousands of people, to do with physiotherapy.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Ministry of Health is planning on eliminating physiotherapy services currently provided to seniors in retirement homes—and changing the current provider of the service as of August 1st, 2013; and

"Whereas the Minister of Health has announced a total of \$33 million in physiotherapy funding, or \$550 per senior, for 60,000 seniors, including those in retirement homes; and

"Whereas instead of the 100 to 150 visits per year a senior may receive now from their dedicated on-site OHIP physiotherapy staff, the change would mean a CCAC therapist would provide 5 to 10 visits on-site only to seniors who are bedridden or have an acute injury. All other ambulatory seniors would have to attend other community locations/clinics for physiotherapy and exercise off-site; and

"Whereas this change not only reduces the amount of money available, but also moves funds from the lowest-cost provider (OHIP physiotherapy providers—\$12.20

per treatment) to the highest-cost provider (CCAC—\$120 per treatment); and

"Whereas current OHIP physiotherapy providers, who have been providing seniors with individualized treatments for over 48 years, will be delisted from OHIP by the government; and

"Whereas these services have been proven to help seniors improve in their activities of daily living, mobility, pain and falls risk;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To review and reverse the decision to eliminate OHIP physiotherapy services to seniors in retirement homes, our most vulnerable population and most at risk for falls; and continue with the provision of at least 100 treatments per year with the current low-cost OHIP physiotherapy providers."

Mr. Speaker, I want to thank all the good friends at Riverwood Retirement Home in Alliston, where I was last Friday, visiting with seniors and discussing this issue.

PHYSIOTHERAPY SERVICES

Miss Monique Taylor: I have a petition from residents across this province.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Ministry of Health is planning to delist OHIP physiotherapy clinics as of August 1st, 2013, which represents cuts in physiotherapy services to seniors, children and people with disabilities who currently receive care at designated OHIP physiotherapy clinics; and

"Whereas people who are currently eligible for OHIP physiotherapy treatments can receive 100 treatments per year plus an additional 50 treatments annually if medically necessary. The proposed change will reduce the number of allowable treatments to 12 per year; while enhancing geographical access is positive, the actual physiotherapy that any individual receives will be greatly reduced; and

"Whereas the current OHIP physiotherapy providers have been providing seniors, children and people with disabilities with individualized treatments for over 48 years, and these services have been proven to help improve function, mobility, activities of daily living, pain, and falls risk;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To review and reverse the decision to drastically cut OHIP physiotherapy services to our most vulnerable population—seniors, children and people with disabilities; and to maintain the policy that seniors, children and people with disabilities continue to receive up to 100 treatments per year at eligible clinics, with a mechanism to access an additional 50 treatments when medically necessary."

I agree with this petition. I will sign it and give it to page Michael to bring to the Clerk.

AIR QUALITY

Mr. Michael Harris: I'd like to read a petition.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas Ontario's Drive Clean program was implemented only as a temporary measure to reduce high levels of vehicle emissions and smog; and

“Whereas vehicle emissions have declined so significantly from 1998 to 2010 that they are no longer among the major domestic contributors of smog in Ontario; and

“Whereas the overwhelming majority of reductions in vehicle emissions were, in fact, the result of factors other than the Drive Clean program, such as tighter manufacturing standards for emission-control technologies; and

“Whereas from 1999 to 2010 the percentage of vehicles that failed emissions testing under the Drive Clean program steadily declined from 16% to 5%; and

“Whereas the environment minister has ignored advances in technology and introduced a new, computerized emissions test that is less reliable and prone to error; and

“Whereas the new Drive Clean test no longer assess tailpipe emissions, but instead scans the on-board diagnostics systems of vehicles, which already perform a series of continuous and periodic emissions checks; and

“Whereas the new Drive Clean test has caused the failure rate to double in less than two months as a result of technical problems with the new emissions testing method; and

“Whereas this new emissions test has caused numerous false ‘fails’, which have resulted in the overcharging of testing fees for Ontario drivers and car dealerships, thereby causing unwarranted economic hardship and stress;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly as follows:

“That the Minister of the Environment must take immediate steps to begin phasing out the Drive Clean program.”

I wholeheartedly agree with this petition, will sign it and send it down to the table.

SERVICES DE PHYSIOTHÉRAPIE

M^{me} France Gélinas: J'ai une pétition qui nous vient de partout en Ontario :

« Attendu que le ministère de la Santé envisage de diminuer les services de physiothérapie offerts aux personnes âgées qui demeurent dans des foyers de soins de longue durée—d'un montant approximatif de 110 millions de dollars à 58,5 millions de dollars; et

« Attendu qu'avec ce changement, les personnes âgées ne recevront pas les soins dont ils ont actuellement droit et qui sont administrés par leurs fournisseurs de physiothérapie de l'assurance-santé que le gouvernement envisage de radier de l'assurance-santé le 1^{er} août 2013; et

« Attendu que le gouvernement a annoncé que le niveau de financement, le nombre de traitements qu'un résident pourrait recevoir, n'a pas été précisé, et sera réduit d'un maximum de 150 visites par année à un niveau inconnu, ce qui signifie que les heures de soins et le nombre de personnes qui fournissent les soins de physiothérapie aux personnes âgées seront également considérablement réduits à compter du 1^{er} août 2013; et

« Attendu que les fournisseurs de physiothérapie de l'assurance-santé ont fourni des traitements individualisés aux personnes âgées pendant plus de 48 ans et que ces services ont été prouvés bénéfiques pour aider les personnes âgées à améliorer les activités de leur vie quotidienne, la mobilité, la douleur et les risques de chutes; »

Ils adressent à l'Assemblée législative de l'Ontario la pétition suivante :

« D'examiner et d'inverser cette réduction drastique aux services de physiothérapie de l'assurance-santé pour les personnes âgées, notre population la plus vulnérable, et de poursuivre le financement de 110 millions de dollars pour la physiothérapie pour les personnes âgées dans les foyers de soins de longue durée. »

J'appuie cette pétition et je vais demander à notre page Vanessa de l'amener aux greffiers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

ORDER OF BUSINESS

Resuming the debate adjourned on June 4, 2013, on the amendment to the amendment to the motion to apply a timetable to certain business of the House.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further debate? The member for Rainy River—Kenora—Rainy River.

Ms. Sarah Campbell: Thank you, Speaker.

Interjection: Way up north.

Ms. Sarah Campbell: Yes, way up north.

I'm very pleased to rise and speak on this programming motion which allows us to move forward with sending the budget bill to committee while establishing firm time frames for the establishment of a Financial Accountability Office for the province of Ontario.

The motion before us is a very important one, and I'm very pleased to offer my support for it because, years from now, when we look back at our time at Queen's Park, there's a very obvious question that we will ask ourselves what did we accomplish? I think it's fair to say that much of the frustration of the first session of this Parliament was that there was perception that we just sat for about a year and had very little to show for it. It's true that we passed a handful of bills, some of them very positive, but I don't think that there was anything that will stand out years or decades from now as establishing a firm vision. In many ways, the first session of this Parliament was a caretaker session.

The motion before us ensures that the same label cannot be applied to this session, and I am proud of what we have accomplished. What's important isn't what this motion is about—it's roughly 1,800 words on paper—but it's about the wheels that it sets in motion. It's about seeing a problem and taking a real and meaningful action to address the issue.

For too long, we've heard about government scandals and poor spending decisions after they've happened. In fact, much of the first session and the current session of this Parliament have been focused on past decisions. It's true that things like Ornge, eHealth and even the gas plants were very poor decisions to make, but the point is that up until this office is established, we're going to be constantly dealing with a post-mortem situation where the damage is already done and it can't be reversed. The money is gone, and it's wasted.

Well, I used a health care analogy a minute ago because it's fitting. As health care professionals will tell you, you can deal with the symptoms that arise after an issue happens at a much higher cost to the system, the individual and society, or you can take preventive steps, many of them as easy as educating yourself and others to prevent those problems from occurring in the first place—preventive medicine.

That's what the Financial Accountability Office is; it's preventive medicine for our province's bottom line, an impartial office that will review the government's spending plans before the cheque is written. Instead of learning about bad spending decisions months or even years after they have been made, when there's no chance to recoup that money, we have someone who can do it before to prevent expensive mistakes from happening. Like it or not, whether you want to admit it or not, every government has made poor decisions, some inadvertent, while others leave you shaking your head, wondering what they were thinking in the first place. Often, it takes years for us to realize the full impact of the decisions that were made.

Take, for instance, hydro prices, which is a very important issue in my riding because we're looking at a series of bad decisions. It would be very interesting to see what changes could have been made if an impartial arm of the government stood up and said, "Wait a minute. Are you sure that this is a good idea?" Because when it comes to electricity prices, we have a lot of people who want to lay blame with the Green Energy Act. Certainly it is an act that deserves a lot of blame, but it wasn't the first mistake that was made either.

If you look at it, a big reason why our electricity system is in disarray is because, in the late 1990s and early 2000s, the government of the day attempted to privatize the system. This created a chain reaction of events that we should be regretting; for instance, the creation of five companies and agencies that now oversee the system. This creates a great deal of overlap and additional bureaucracy that adds tens of millions of dollars of cost each and every year.

Part of that same process was forcing many municipalities to sell their utilities to the province. Some did; some

didn't. Many of those communities did, though, including some in my riding that are now deeply regretting that decision because it probably cost them jobs as well. On top of that, we have the debt retirement charge that was created to, in theory, pay off a huge amount of debt in a short amount of time so we could right the ship for private investors. That, of course, is a sore spot for many.

Then the government was booted out, and we saw the current government come in, and they had their own plans. Many of those plans made the problem worse, such as the Green Energy Act, for instance, which in theory could be a very good piece of legislation. But the government was too eager, and it started paying rates that were simply not sustainable, which, in turn, drove up prices again.

The point is, what kind of a situation would we be in currently if we had something like a Financial Accountability Office, an office that could have impartially reviewed the numbers and said, "Wait a minute. Disbanding Ontario Hydro into five other agencies is going to drive prices up," or "Forcing municipalities to sell off their utilities is going to add unneeded debt to the system and take vital decision-making powers out of their hands"? Maybe some of those communities could have combatted the downturn in the forest industry, where many of the problems we faced were the result of high hydro prices, and kept jobs in the community, but we'll never know.

1620

The point is to not rehash the poor decisions that have been made, but to look at why the Financial Accountability Office is so important. Often, governments get so focused on a single goal, such as promoting green energy or privatization, that they fail to look at the eventual repercussions, and this office provides with us that extra check, one that is independent and impartial. Because we're facing serious challenges in Ontario today, we need to ensure that the decisions that we're making work not only in the short term but in the long term as well.

For instance, there are proposals out there today about privatizing certain revenue-generating arms of the government such as the LCBO and Ontario lotteries. I believe that the people bringing forward these issues are focused far too much on the short-term benefit: a huge influx of cash that will help in the short term. But what about the long term, when billions of dollars of dividends that these organizations pay are no longer coming into the provincial coffers? What will we do then? Would we have to reduce services and raise taxes, maybe privatize other portions of the government? We can speculate or we can have an independent office of this Legislature review those plans and give us a pretty effective preview. It has worked federally, particularly when it came to the cost overruns of the F-35 program, and I believe very strongly that it will work provincially and it will help ensure that we are being responsible to the taxpayers who sent us here.

Sometimes the well-intentioned people in charge of making these costly decisions forget that it isn't the

government's money they're spending; it's the taxpayers' money. We have an obligation to ensure that that money is spent well and it's spent wisely. We could go even as far as the gas plant scandal, which has dominated our agenda since we returned in February. What would have happened if, before the decisions were made and the i's were dotted and the t's were crossed, the Financial Accountability Officer had performed projections and had come out and said that the actual cost of cancelling the plants in Mississauga or Oakville would be \$500 million or more? There were calls to cancel the plant before the election. Would that have changed the way that the campaign played out? Would that have maybe prevented the cancellation from happening? We can't say for certain now because it's already done; the money has been spent. But instead of it being a hot-button issue in one community, I'm pretty sure that there would have been province-wide attention and province-wide repercussions if someone said, "Well, it's going to cost this amount of money but we're going to do it anyway." We didn't hear about the gas plants in the north during the campaign, and I'm sure it's fair to say that many of the 107 ridings didn't hear about them during the 2011 election. I have a feeling that if we had known what the cost would be, maybe we'd be looking at a completely different result, or money that would not have been spent.

That's why we should be very proud of what we're about to accomplish with the creation of the Financial Accountability Office. While the office has been effective federally, we can make it even better in Ontario because we're aware of some of the shortcomings of the federal version. I'd like, if I could, to look at some of the roles and responsibilities that this Financial Accountability Office will have in Ontario.

As I've said, the Financial Accountability Office will operate independently and impartially and have powers similar to the Information and Privacy Commissioner to order the release of documents, which will help ensure that the office has the information it needs to put together future realistic projections.

Like the Ombudsman's office, the Financial Accountability Office will report directly to the Legislature, and MPPs can request assessments from the office if they're concerned with a particular department, agency or spending program. The office will be able to monitor spending and revenue at government departments, crown corporations and agencies, meaning that they would be able to provide us with a very good assessment of the long-term implications of privatizing an agency like the LCBO, OLG, or even ServiceOntario.

The office will also be able to examine the costs and the outcomes of proposed legislation, even private members' bills, which should provide us with some very valuable insight as we enter into these discussions.

In other words, this office will have some pretty broad and significant powers to examine government spending, and that is what we need in Ontario, and right across Canada, for that matter, because it's no secret that people have become cynical. It seems like every time they turn

around, one level of government or another is involved in a spending scandal. I understand that frustration, because I hear about it from my constituents.

But rather than repeat the cycle of replacing one scandal-plagued government with another government that will end up being plagued with scandals of its own, isn't it better to do something that will actually get to the root of the problem? Rather than sit and point fingers—and we see this all the time in question period, where a member of the opposition will ask a question and a minister of the government will respond with, "Well, your government did this and the government before it did that"—if there was a system that could be put in place that would prevent money from being misspent, shouldn't we do that? We're not talking about Mickey Mouse agencies; we're talking about departments and organizations that are well respected and will be listened to. For instance, if the Environmental Commissioner of Ontario says something, people take notice. If he points out how policy is failing to achieve desired results, then there's a good chance that something will change. Similarly, if the Auditor General speaks up, all of the legislators in this House, the media and the people of the province listen. If the Ombudsman of this province singles out a problem, the government listens, as do the people of Ontario, the opposition, the media and anybody else who might be affected.

The reason for this is because all of these offices are impartial and they have been created to act as a watchdog for issues that we believe need to be respected. I believe we need to respect our taxpayers, our hard-working families, and that we need to raise the bar of accountability. Really, we have to do that. If we ever want voter turnout and voter participation to increase, this is something that we have to do. The creation of a Financial Accountability Office will do that and it will help to ensure that we do not continue to make the same mistakes over and over again. It ensures that government proposals and even MPP private members' bills are properly costed out before they are adopted, to prevent waste.

The worst thing that we can do in the face of scandals like eHealth, Ornge and the gas plants is to do nothing. That is the most irresponsible thing that we could do. Instead of pointing fingers and trying to score political points, I think we really need to take a step back and ask ourselves what we can do to ensure that scandals like this do not happen again, because governments of all stripes have a long track record that suggests that if all we do is replace one party with another party, we're not actually going to get the results that we need.

Speaker, I'm very proud to say that the office of the Financial Accountability Officer is what we need to do to achieve the results that we need. It's very easy to talk the talk about accountability and respect for taxpayers, but now it is time to walk the walk. That's why I'm very proud to stand here today and to say to the people of my riding and everyone else across Ontario that we are hearing your concerns about government waste and improper spending, and we're going to do something meaningful about it.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further debate?

Mr. Rob E. Milligan: As always, it's a great privilege and honour to stand here in the chamber and debate in a democratic fashion the concerns we have as opposition toward this government and the programming motion.

I'd first like to look back at what this government has done since the throne speech, and here's the issue: The Premier has increased the size of her cabinet by 25%. That's an additional \$3 million that the Premier is paying her Liberal cabinet in salaries. That's \$3 million that comes out of public coffers, that could be going towards other, more important initiatives and programs that could actually do something, whether it's in health care, education or the issue of infrastructure that we've hardly debated here in the chamber.

1630

So right from the get-go, what we saw from this Liberal government is not the positioning of taking austerity measures or making the hard decisions that have to be made to get this province back on track. What we've seen is a Premier who actually has increased spending already with the throne speech and now with the motion on the budget. She's allowed the public sector wages to unsustainably continue to rise, although this is something we have come to expect of the Liberal government. All we need to do is take a look at the sunshine list, which increased by 11% to 88,412 workers in 2012; an 11% increase, and that's just in the number of individuals on the list. That doesn't address exactly the increases financially that the members already on the sunshine list were receiving.

There's an example, Madam Speaker, of one individual in 2011 who was making \$135,000; in 2012, when the sunshine list came out, that same individual was making \$185,000. That's a \$50,000 wage increase in a matter of one year. This is the kind of thing that we have to address. This is why the province of Ontario is in the financial ruins that we are today.

We need to actually come up with a plan, and I think, all partisanship aside, Tim Hudak and the PC caucus have come out with a plan, a strategy, that's going to actually address these concerns. The government hasn't been listening; they've been saying, "We want to have real conversation, respectful conversation about the issues facing this province." But yet, every time we try to reach out to this government with ideas on how we can work together collaboratively, what do we get? We get stonewalled at every turn.

I do agree with what the member from Kenora–Rainy River said about Ontarians wanting their governments to work and work possibly together. But this environment here, with this current Liberal government and this current Premier, they're unwilling to do so. It's unfortunate that the Liberal government has gone out and completely ignored our PC plan to institute an across-the-board wage freeze, which would save the province \$2 billion a year—\$2 billion. But that's just the starting point.

When I was doing some training on first aid—and I'll use the province of Ontario as the patient or victim, if you will, who has succumbed to injuries. The first thing you are taught is to check for breathing. Well, the province is barely breathing, but they're breathing nonetheless. The next thing you look for is bleeding, to stop any bleeding that is occurring. Well, this province, financially, is hemorrhaging. So this wage freeze would actually stop the bleeding so that the victim can sort of be retained. Then you tend to the broken bones. Once you've stopped the hemorrhaging, the bleeding, you check for broken bones, and you put a splint or a makeshift cast on there to make sure the bones are set properly, to get that patient—well, you can use the analogy of the bones or the skeletal system, financially, for the manufacturing and the jobs sector here in the province of Ontario.

We have to do this to get the province back on track. The public sector wage freeze was a great start to get that rolling. Of course, then we have to get the patient to hospital for medical care. In this case, it would be the change of government to a PC Tim Hudak-led government.

These are the types of initiatives that we need to take to get the province back on track, and Tim Hudak and the PC caucus are the only ones standing up for Ontarians when it comes to this.

Also, they've ignored their own hand-selected economist, Don Drummond, whom they paid to write a report with recommendations on how we can get out of this fiscal crisis. There are approximately 362 recommendations, and this government has said they have implemented most of those recommendations. However, that's a little misleading. Mr. Drummond himself, actually, has said they've only reached or obtained approximately 14% of those recommendations, and of those recommendations, the easy decisions have been made.

We need to do much better. We need a leader who is actually going to make those tough decisions during tough times, and Tim Hudak is that leader. We're not seeing that from this Premier. This Premier would rather have real conversations and work with the coalition with the NDP, and here's the proof of the pudding. We have a scandal-plagued government that has spent upwards of a billion dollars to save four Liberal seats. Maybe NDP seats aren't worth as much, because the Premier cut a deal with the NDP: about a billion dollars for 18 NDP seats. I don't know. Obviously, Liberal seats are worth more than NDP seats. Nonetheless, here again we have a government that is buying seats.

The process is broken. Instead, the Liberal government continues to grow the size of government, and they continue to create expensive, new, unnecessary government programs, like the Green Energy Act, that this province cannot afford. Let me just talk a little bit about the Green Energy Act, because it ties into those broken bones—the manufacturing sector here in the province of Ontario.

I held a round table discussion in my riding of Northumberland–Quinte West—I encourage everyone at

home and people here today in the galleries to come down and visit Northumberland–Quinte West, a fantastic destination. We have great festivals and great products—farm-fresh produce to buy. But I digress.

When I had this round table, our energy critic, the member from Nipissing, Mr. Fedeli, came down and did a fantastic job of pointing out to the Northumberland Manufacturers' Association and the Quinte Manufacturers Association that one of the issues and challenges these manufacturers are having is directly related to the Green Energy Act.

The Green Energy Act is not only creating divisiveness between neighbours and small communities in rural Ontario, but it's also an economic failure. The fact is that the contract signed by this government for industrial wind turbines is a bad deal. Anywhere between 11.5 and 13 cents per kilowatt hour is what they're paying these contractors, but what's even more important is that in the agreement they actually have to take that production first, before nuclear, before hydro.

What we have is an environment where 10 years ago, when the Liberals came to power and wanted to brand themselves as the green energy government, hydro-electricity met approximately 25% of our electricity needs in the province. Today, only 22% is generated by hydro—clean, green; you couldn't get much cleaner than that. It's on demand when you need it. But here we go. Wind and solar make up another approximately 3%. So we're still at 25%—22% hydro, 3% wind and solar. So we're still no greener 10 years later than we were a decade ago when this government decided that this would be in the best interests of Ontarians.

1640

But what we are for manufacturers—those broken bones I've spoken of here—we need to set them. We have those contracts, when the wind does blow—usually at night. The pinnacle of wind turbine production is in the off-peak hours. So what did that actually cost Ontarians last year? Well, you have to look at the Auditor General's report. This isn't partisan facts. This is an independent body that looks at these things. We noticed that we had to pay \$300 million last year for wind production when the wind did blow during the day, but during off-peak hours when we were producing electricity but we don't have the demand because we have no manufacturing jobs left here in the province of Ontario, we actually had to pay other jurisdictions to take our surplus energy. And what did that cost the taxpayers of Ontario? Well, approximately \$400 million. Already, we're at \$700 million that it cost taxpayers last year, but who takes the brunt of this? It's the manufacturing sector in their global adjustment that they get monthly.

One of the issues and concerns that I had when I went to ESCO, the foundry in the great town of Port Hope, was the fact that every month their global adjustment could fluctuate anywhere from \$16,000 to \$24,000, and you're like, "Wow, that's significant." But that's not the be-all and end-all. What's even worse is that this is a branch plant from the United States, so they have to

report their quarterly profits and their productivity to their headquarters, and when headquarters looks at the statistics, the energy costs, production levels and so on, when they see that the cost of their branch in Port Hope—doing business is so much substantially higher than it is in other jurisdictions which have affordable energy, that's a major concern. If that company has to restructure itself, well, which plant do you think is going to be on the chopping block first? The plant in Port Hope, Ontario, and that's not fair.

Mr. Monte McNaughton: Sad.

Mr. Rob E. Milligan: It is very sad.

Also, other levels of unnecessary government and programs—well, let's talk about the College of Trades, the forced program that is being thrust upon the tradespeople of this great province. Plumbers used to pay \$60 every three years to renew their licence. Now they're being charged \$120 a year—right?—to prop up and create another layer of bureaucracy that does absolutely nothing—absolutely nothing. I am inundated with tradespeople in my riding who are outraged at this. They see it as another unfair tax grab by—sorry—tax revenue tool by this Liberal government. It's not sustainable.

Also in the budget, there are other tax grabs on the citizens of Ontario to pay for their way-out-of-control spending. This is one of the problems that we're looking at now. The Premier said, "We're looking at revenue tools," just like it's not a tax; it's a revenue tool. It's not a tax; it's a premium. It's not a tax; it's a fee. A rose by any other name is still a rose, and this rose stinks.

This Premier is asking for a 1%—

Interjections.

Mr. Rob E. Milligan: I must be obviously hitting some really good points here, Madam Speaker, because I'm being heckled by the opposition. Obviously, they're a little tender about this.

This Premier has asked for another 1% increase in the HST, another five cents per litre at the gas pumps. Right? Also, the member from Newmarket–Aurora, Mr. Klees, makes it very clear the last few days we've been sitting here—he actually makes sense—there is approximately so much waste here that we could actually save the \$2 billion a year in revenue that this government is looking for to address the infrastructure issues in the greater Toronto and Hamilton areas. We can find that waste. If this government didn't waste so much money on eHealth—we're out over \$2 billion now on eHealth, and where have we gotten? Are all the records online? Are they accessible? It's going to save so much money, but this government is wasting money. What about Ornge, the waste there at Ornge? It's a shame. This government should be ashamed of the waste that it has incurred, the scandals it has incurred, off the hard-working families here in the province of Ontario.

This Premier has claimed that she is making the tough decisions to restrain or rein in their overspending, but that's simply not true. If you read their own budget, you'll see that their increase in spending is actually about \$3.6 billion—\$3.6 billion more this year than last year.

Mr. Duncan, the former finance minister—the honourable member Mr. Duncan—actually didn’t spend as much as this finance minister and this Premier.

At the same time, they’ve done nothing to close the deficit of the province. We’re sitting at approximately \$11 billion a year in interest payments alone. If there was another ministry that just handled provincial debt, it would be the third-largest ministry, next to health care and education. That’s how large this ministry would be—\$11 billion in interest at a time when we’re at historic low records for interest rates.

Interjection.

Mr. Rob E. Milligan: Mr. Gerretsen probably hasn’t even seen interest rates—sorry, the Attorney General hasn’t seen interest rates that low in his lifetime.

What happens, though, when interest rates start to climb up, which they inevitably will do? For every 1% that the interest rate goes up, that’s an additional \$500 million in interest alone that actually has to come out of services in health care, services in education, rebuilding the infrastructure that this province needs to get back on track. We cannot allow this to happen.

This government has done very little to address these concerns, and as an elected official—my constituents recognize this. That’s why they sent me here, to make sure that this government is held to account, to make the right decisions. I’m here to do that today on behalf of those fine people back in Northumberland—Quinte West, and I will continue to do that, because it’s important to my children, my former students and my constituents.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further debate?

Mr. Monte McNaughton: I’m pleased to rise this afternoon to respond and to debate the programming motion. I, like many other people, am upset that this government has fallen short of fulfilling their duty as a government and seem to have fallen, again, into the trap of playing politics rather than serving the people of this province.

A government should always strive to create the best environment for the people in this province to succeed. Unfortunately, the Liberal government has failed at its attempt to draft any legislation that does just this. This motion and budget falls short because it lacks the necessary fundamentals to create jobs and grow Ontario’s economy. Without a strong foundation, without the right fundamentals, Ontario’s economy will not grow, and in fact, will decline.

1650

One essential element of a strong foundation is a government that represents its people. This is done through detailed consultations with stakeholders and constituents alike. I disagree with the Liberal government’s approach of implementing legislation without consultation. The people know the challenges Ontario is facing, because they live with them each and every day and therefore must be considered in government legislation.

There are so many examples of the Liberals’ lack of consultation that I cannot list them all in the 20 minutes that I have, but I will list a few current ones that I would

like to bring to the attention of this House. An example of this government’s lack of consultation can be found on page 262 of the recent Wynne-Horwath budget, which announces the elimination of the Apprenticeship Training Tax Credit for only contact call centres. This change could result in the loss of over 25,000 jobs across Ontario with this single decision.

Now, it’s important to note that under this government jobs in Ontario are hard to come by. There are 600,000 men and women who are unemployed in this province, and now there could be an additional 25,000 people out of work with the implementation of this single initiative. Of course, the majority of these contact call centres are located in places like Vaughan, North Bay, Toronto, London, Chatham, Brantford and Windsor.

At 10% unemployment, London currently has the highest big-city unemployment rate in the country and, sadly, there is an 11.3% unemployment rate in North Bay, and 9.3% in the city of Windsor. Ironically, contact call centres, which are located in all of these regions, are one of the few industries that are managing to succeed. It makes no sense that this government would put so many jobs at risk when the industry creates so many jobs and is located in regions where jobs are scarce.

The programming motion here today does nothing to help these people and nothing to help create jobs. In fact, for residents who are employed in the contact calling industry, the news only gets worse. I am saddened, but not surprised, that the Wynne government is taking the same approach as the McGuinty government. It is evident that nothing has changed here at Queen’s Park. We are seeing policies that impact thousands of people being implemented without consultation. We are seeing this government do what is best for their political party and not what is best for the people of Ontario.

In my great riding of Lambton-Kent-Middlesex, I have met with dozens of organizations and groups that represented a variety of social and economic interests. I have met with hundreds of stakeholder groups and constituents who have told me that Ontario needs a new direction, a new path. They want things to change, and the people of this province have to be involved in that change.

Another example of the lack of consultation that we have seen from the McGuinty-Wynne government is their attempt to expand their massive empire in the gaming business at the OLG. This expansion proposed 29 new casinos across the province and pulled the rug out from under Ontario’s successful horse racing industry. It is only now that things are not going smoothly that we are seeing the Wynne government—confused, at best, would be a polite way to put it. But they are potentially backtracking on their plan to increase Ontario’s tax revenue in a desperate attempt to try to foot the bill for this government’s spending problem.

The government has failed to involve local communities in the process of siting these new casinos. Instead, they are planning on dictating where casinos will go, without local involvement. This is something that is

totally unacceptable. Governments cannot go around dictating from Toronto, from Queen's Park, where casinos will go and what communities will have to host the gaming sites.

Similarly, in my riding of Lambton-Kent-Middlesex my constituents are forced to accept wind turbines in their local communities without local input or third party health studies. This is not how governments should operate. In fact, this is a sign of a tired government, an arrogant government, running the show from inside Queen's Park.

A government's job is to serve the people, not to force them to take on unwanted infrastructure like industrial wind turbines. We have an obligation as legislators to listen to local voices and heed their input. The people in the communities across Ontario know what is best for the communities they live in. They know what will work and what will not.

During the last session of Parliament, I introduced a private member's bill to help ensure local voices in new casino developments. My bill passed second reading, went through the committee process and was up for third reading when Dalton McGuinty decided to resign and lock up the Ontario Legislature until the Liberal Party got their affairs in order and coronated a new leader. Once again, we saw this government doing what was best for themselves, what was best for their own party, the Liberal Party, and not what was best for the people of Ontario.

Since the McGuinty-Wynne government has been in office, we have seen no change in how the government handles itself. We are still seeing an iron fist approach to ruling, a lack of consultation and political games being played day in and day out here in the Legislature. Again, this programming motion does nothing to end these games.

Now some might say that Kathleen Wynne is going about—or our Premier is going about—trying to remedy all of the errors of Dalton McGuinty. She seems to have made some recent changes to Ontario's failed Green Energy Act. I have to say that Kathleen Wynne's attempt to remedy the green energy disaster—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): [Inaudible] the individual about whom you are speaking.

Mr. Monte McNaughton: Sorry, Speaker.

I have to say that the Premier's attempt to remedy the green energy disaster is too little, too late. What about the communities who have been contracted? There are going to be roughly 600 industrial wind turbines constructed across my riding of Lambton-Kent-Middlesex. The damage has been done. Property values have been impacted, and the men and women in my riding have health concerns from these turbines because this government cannot be bothered to conduct the correct third party health studies prior to pushing ahead with the development of wind turbines.

The Green Energy Act has been a disaster since the beginning, and only now, about four years after it was first implemented, do we get any form of recognition that

the turbine siting process is badly flawed and completely unfair to our communities. But again, from my riding and the people from Lambton-Kent-Middlesex, 600 wind turbines are going to be constructed, many over the next 18 months.

This lack of consultation also speaks to the lack of transparency of this Liberal government. I know it's been mentioned many, many times, but we have seen eHealth, Ornge, diluted cancer treatment drugs and last, but certainly not least, a billion-dollar gas plant scandal. I'm not even going back more than a couple of years. There are many, many more tales of scandal and waste, but if I were to go back into detail about the failures of this government, we would be here all day.

Further to my point, the Premier's time in office is a clear indication of her unwillingness to make the necessary and urgent decisions needed to fix the Liberals' made-in-Ontario jobs and debt crisis. When the new Premier says she wants to build on Dalton McGuinty's legacy, I question how she could fail to recognize the amount of scandal that the McGuinty legacy is built on. Indeed, the McGuinty-Wynne legacy is a tale of injustice and mismanagement that has cost Ontario taxpayers billions and billions of dollars. While the scandals pile up, the taxpayers are being left with the bill.

The NDP have called for the establishment of a Financial Accountability Office. This seems good in theory, but the real issue here is the government in power. The Liberal government is plagued with scandals and has shown no interest in changing their ways. We need to get to the root of the problem. The proposed Financial Accountability Office will not solve the real issues at play here; replacing the current Liberal government will. Let's be honest: Ontario has a scandalous government. The NDP has such a strong opposition to their ways, when they are supporting this budget—it just makes no sense to me. In order to deal with this government, they must be replaced. Creating a Financial Accountability Office will not get the job done.

Ontario families know that they cannot trust the Liberal government to stand up for their local communities and they most certainly cannot trust their Premier to get to the bottom of her own scandals, and this programming motion here today does nothing to resolve these concerns. Instead of standing up to the grave injustices of the McGuinty-Wynne government, we are seeing the leader of the third party, the leader of the NDP, support the government's budget and support the current government's leadership. It is totally unacceptable that this government is being supported, despite all the scandals, blunders and mistakes.

1700

The priorities of the McGuinty-Wynne-Horwath government are not for the people of Ontario. Instead, it is about playing politics and staying in power. The Premier's priorities are to increase her government, and we see this in her budget and now in this programming motion as well.

Ironically, one of the first orders of business for this new Premier was to increase cabinet by 22%, adding at

least \$3 million more to Ontario's debt. That follows deliberate choices to hand the chequebook over to union bosses at the expense of students and parents in our education system and park the Drummond commission's 362 recommendations permanently on the shelf. In fact, I would dare to say that this Premier may not even have read the Drummond report.

I would like to just refer to the pre-budget consultation 2013, the report to the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs, just to talk a bit about the seriousness of the debt crisis in the province of Ontario: "Net provincial debt (the difference between liabilities and financial assets) was \$235.6 billion in 2011-12 and is forecast to increase to \$255.1 billion in 2012-13" growing to "\$275 billion in 2013-14, \$290.8 billion in 2014-15, \$301.2 billion in 2015-16 and \$308.1 billion in" fiscal year "2016-17. Net debt per capita was \$17,625 in 2011-12 and similarly is expected to increase to \$19,075 in 2012-13."

Another report says that, in fiscal year 2019-20, the debt in the province of Ontario is going to hit \$550 billion. That's coming in at approximately \$40,000 per capita. When this government was elected, it was \$11,000 per capita. So the debt crisis is very real, and the Liberal government continually ignores that. That's why we're seeing the increase in spending.

From this government we see no initiatives to reduce the size and cost of government. Instead of restraint, we continue to have a government spending more, doubling our debt, as I mentioned, over the past nine years and growing that debt to \$550 billion by 2019-20.

Over the past decade as well on the jobs front, Ontario has lost 300,000 good jobs in the manufacturing sector but, at the same time, we saw 300,000 more added to an already bloated government payroll. Soon the only industry in Ontario will be government. If you look at the StatsCan data from the last year, the government sector has grown by 48,000 jobs—that's over 12 months, Speaker. The government sector has grown by 48,000 jobs, and we haven't seen a single net new job added in the private sector. Fewer people are working outside the government, paying for more people working inside the government with higher wages, benefits and pensions than those who are paying the taxes.

We see reports from the Canadian Federation of Independent Business indicating that public sector workers earn 27% more in wages, pensions and benefits than their counterparts in the private sector.

Ignoring the issues Ontario is facing is not solving the problem. Throwing money at the province's problems are not long-term solutions, and certainly this programming motion here does nothing to resolve any of these concerns.

We are facing the biggest jobs and debt crisis of our lifetimes. Anyone who has ever been faced with a crisis will tell you that spending more money and ignoring the core issues will not save you. The only way forward is to move confidently and boldly in the direction you know is right.

Ontario needs a new approach, one that will create jobs and stop reckless overspending. It's clear that the current government is not up to the challenge of doing this. The Ontario PC Party, and our leader, Tim Hudak, are the only party with a comprehensive plan to end overspending and grow Ontario's economy. I am proud to say that our Ontario PC team has put forward a plan to rein in overspending, get our economic fundamentals right and grow the economy through our Paths to Prosperity white papers: bold ideas to create a leaner public service that delivers more value for less money; lower taxes on businesses so that they can invest and create jobs right here in the province of Ontario; reduce the heavy hand of the 300,000 regulations that stand between businesses and success; fix outdated labour laws that have made us uncompetitive and are costing us jobs every day; and create more affordable energy for Ontario families by treating energy as an economic fundamental rather than a social experiment.

We can no longer be content by being first in debt and last in job creation. Ontario will rise again and reach its true potential, but only if we change the team that leads the province of Ontario. I would encourage our Premier to adopt the policies we have proposed and take a read-through of the Paths to Prosperity series, now a dozen individual white papers, all featuring bold and innovative policy discussions and commentary. Our party is committed to working hard for Ontario families and Ontario businesses, and that is why we are offering real solutions for the disaster that this Liberal government has gotten us into. Sadly, we have seen no change and no renewal from the recycled Liberal caucus and Premier.

While the politically easy thing to do may have been to let the budget pass, as those in the third party have chosen to do, we have a responsibility to demand a plan that brings about a major change in the direction of this province. It is unfortunate that Premier Wynne has decided to ignore our recommendations and has included none of them in her budget or her government's legislation. This Premier had an opportunity to change course and move Ontario down a different path, but regrettably for Ontario, the Premier and the leader of the third party, the NDP, have chosen to further entrench the Liberals' spending and scandal-plagued legacy.

We need a new approach in Ontario, and it starts with having only as much government as we can afford. For this reason, my colleagues and I will be opposing the programming motion. I encourage everyone in this House, especially the members of the third party, to really reconsider their decision because, as I said, in 2003 when this government came to office the debt was around \$135 billion and by 2019-20 it's going to be \$550 billion. That's just unacceptable, and really defines the legacy of Dalton McGuinty and now Premier Wynne.

Maybe that's why we're seeing this government looking at hiking fees and hiking taxes, whether it's a 1% HST hike or a five-cent-a-litre gas tax. We're seeing in the Globe and Mail and the Toronto Star—I know the Toronto Sun has an article about these massive fee hikes,

whether it's photo radar or paying more for Drive Clean. They're even considering that when people go to a ServiceOntario centre, they're going to have to pay a fee to have service from the government. It's completely unacceptable.

For this reason, I'm proud to stand on behalf of the people who sent me here to do a job for them and to be their voice. I'm proud to oppose this Liberal government. It's full of scandal, it's full of waste and it has to go.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further debate?

Ms. Sylvia Jones: It's an honour to rise this afternoon on behalf of the residents of Dufferin–Caledon and discuss the matter before us. I'm actually quite surprised that no one from the NDP or the Liberal Party believes that Ontario's finances or, in fact, the debate that is occurring in this chamber today, are worthy of debate. But we in the Progressive Conservative caucus certainly believe it is, and therefore I'm happy to join.

We have over half a million people out of work in Ontario today, we've lost 300,000 manufacturing jobs and the party opposite has doubled our debt. Yet instead of focusing on these crucial issues, the Liberals put their own party's interests ahead of Ontarians. Confidence is one thing, but a callous disregard for hard-working taxpayers is quite another. That's what the continually unfolding gas plants scandal is all about: hundreds of millions of taxpayers' dollars spent to win an election in a few seats. That crosses the line.

1710

A want of confidence motion is important, because the PC caucus believes, unlike the budding NDP–Liberal coalition, that the government has lost the confidence of the people. Ontarians deserve better. The Liberal government's total disregard for taxpayers, and efforts to keep the truth from Ontarians about the Oakville and Mississauga gas plant cancellations, cross the line.

We learned from the Auditor General how deep this scandal goes, and that is why we were clear from the beginning that the matter had to be voted on, and in this chamber, as a matter of confidence.

We knew the Liberals would do anything to protect their political interests. The unfortunate thing is that the NDP have now decided to side with the Liberal government instead of with Ontario taxpayers.

What a difference a few short weeks can make. It was only a short time ago that the NDP caucus was rising in this chamber, and pounding their table at committee, claiming that the Liberal government had misled Ontarians about the Oakville and Mississauga gas plants. And yet, here we are. Today, we see the NDP not only fully supporting the Liberal government but actually assisting them in suppressing debate and speeding the NDP–Liberal budget through the chamber.

If we don't hold the Liberals to account now for their dishonesty and how taxpayer dollars were spent in this gas plant fiasco, we will surely see more of it from them. Ontario cannot afford for the Liberals to continue to put the interests of the Liberal Party ahead of solving our jobs and debt crisis.

The NDP may have decided they have no problem propping up the government that they themselves have chastised for misleading Ontarians, but the PC caucus most certainly disagrees.

Now, I can understand why the NDP's strategists and friends may believe it's in their political interests to keep the Liberals in charge, but I can't see how that is in the best interests of taxpayers or the half a million people looking for a job in Ontario. We owe it to them to hold this government to account and put Ontario back on the right track.

The NDP–Liberal budget, or the Prosperous and Fair Ontario Act (Budget Measures), 2013, as they like to call it, was introduced in this Legislature on May 2. Now, just a few weeks later, they want to pass a programming motion.

Well, since the budget was introduced, I've had time to take in some Dufferin–Caledon residents' comments and concerns, and do you know what I'm hearing? I'm hearing concerns about the deficit. I'm hearing concerns about jobs. I'm hearing concerns about leadership, or the lack thereof.

It is this last point, the utter lack of leadership by this government, that I'd like to focus on for a moment, because I really feel like the party opposite's budgetary policy crystallizes just how misguided this government is.

To illustrate my point, consider the context within which we presently find ourselves. Just about three months ago, a new Premier moved into the corner office on this very floor, just down the hall—a new Premier, but clearly the same tired, old Liberal government. So we now had a new Premier in Ontario, one selected by Liberal Party brass and activists, but a new Premier nonetheless.

Now, don't get me wrong, Speaker. I know that is the process, and I know that's how our democratic system works. But what I can't understand is, sure, that may be the system, but upon becoming Premier, upon receiving that honour, there's no reason why Premier Wynne couldn't have presented a bold new direction for Ontario. Premier Wynne could have swept into office on the winds of change, could have proposed that any number of failed Liberal policies be scrapped in favour of those she felt were better for Ontario.

In short, the Premier could have presented a vision for a brighter future, a vision for a stronger, a healthier and, frankly, a more prosperous Ontario. But alas, no such vision ever came.

Instead, what Dufferin–Caledon families saw was the Premier clinging to the same old flawed Dalton McGuinty policies that got our province into the mess it is in today. Instead, what we see is a three-month-old Premier introduce a budget that is not reflective of her vision for Ontario but, rather, of the NDP's vision for Ontario.

So what does that say about our rookie Premier? It says that, just like her mentor, her predecessor, Dalton McGuinty, the Premier is concerned about one thing and one thing only: clinging to power at all costs. Her pre-

decessor spent an estimated \$585 million that we know of on a seat-saver program cancelling gas plants, and now the Premier proposes to spend \$1 billion on a government-saver program buying off the NDP. What else could possibly explain the Liberal government's budget, containing so much spending directed precisely by the NDP? All it's doing is trying to save their seats and avoid an election. It is astonishing.

For example, we've heard the Premier talk about the transit investment for what seems like weeks and weeks on end. Yet when it comes to the budget, we see \$1 billion dedicated to running from an election and next to nothing on transit. So I caution all the Ontarians watching the debate today and following the discussion surrounding the Metrolinx report: When the Premier talks about things like revenue tools, when the Premier talks about the need for transit funding and the lack of funds available, remember that she found \$1 billion to save her government by buying NDP support.

This brings me back to what I was talking about earlier, which was having a vision. Real leadership would have been acting on what we have been saying. Real leadership is not the catalogue of broken promises we see from the Liberals; real leadership is doing what you say that you're going to do. If the Premier truly believes in the transit plan she speaks of, then I ask: Why didn't she commit the \$1-billion NDP bounty to, say, transit instead? The answer is simple, Speaker: Because the leader of the third party never told the Premier to do so, and so the Premier ignored it.

Let's call it as it is. This government's budgetary policy is less about governance and more about survival. That's why all the Liberal speakers continue to stand up and boast about their NDP budget. The only thing that is Liberal about this budget is the fact that their finance minister introduced it. No leadership, no recognition of the terrible spending crisis in Ontario; just plain old simple political maneuvering to desperately hang on to power.

That's why the PC caucus has been very consistent in our approach to this flawed NDP-Liberal approach. In fact, it mirrors our response to this government as a whole. We've said from the beginning that unless we saw real, meaningful change on a number of specific issues, we simply could not and would not support this government.

It's really quite simple. The province of Ontario needs a government that has a plan to reduce spending and create jobs. This government does not have a clue how to do either, and so we cannot in good faith support them.

Today, there are over half a million people in Ontario who want to work but can't find a job in their home province. Those are the folks the Liberal government should be thinking of when writing a budget, not the NDP.

The sad news is that this government just doesn't get it. If they did, they would realize that the first step to getting spending under control is to stop spending. Yet all one must do is consult page 208 of the provincial

budget to see that spending has actually increased by \$3.6 billion next year alone.

The sad truth is that the Liberal government has no real plan at all to balance the budget. That's the reality of their budgetary policy: no plan and no commitment to responsible fiscal management.

Does the government have the intention to balance the budget? Perhaps. But the reality is that with no plan, their good intentions, no matter how well placed, are just the foundations of yet more broken Liberal promises. We've been down this road already, Speaker, and if we continue on the current path, the dire predictions of Don Drummond will come true. By 2017-18, our provincial debt will eclipse \$400 billion and our deficit will soar to \$30 billion.

The Liberal government and the Premier tell us that this budget is about making minority Parliament work. The line has been used repeatedly: "Ontarians don't want an election." But I have an unfortunate suspicion that this mentality has the Premier, her government, and their NDP backers wrongly thinking that people endorse the Liberal government. When I talk to residents in Dufferin-Caledon, nothing could be further from the truth.

1720

What people don't want is to see their money wasted and their children's future mortgaged with unsustainable debt. Today in Ontario, every single man, woman and child owes \$20,000 as their portion of the provincial debt, and yet here in this budget we see that the Liberal government plans to spend over \$30 million a day more than it takes in in taxes. We see spending increasing in two thirds of the government ministries, despite the fact that Ontario's provincial debt has already soared to \$273 billion, double what it was when the Liberals formed government.

Under this Liberal administration, government revenues have increased by \$42 billion since 2003. This represents an unbelievable 56% increase in government revenues since the Liberals formed government, and yet, still, Ontario's deficit is larger than all of the other provincial deficits in Canada combined. In fact, under the Liberal government, spending has become so out of control that today a Dufferin-Caledon resident owes \$20,000 as their share of the provincial debt compared to approximately \$17,000 as their share of the national debt. That is all the proof you need of the spending crisis here in the province of Ontario.

Despite all of these alarming numbers, however, the Liberal budgetary policy is centred on one thing, and one thing alone: staying in power. And they're willing to spend any amount of money to do it. That is why it is abundantly clear that the only way to help Ontario become strong again and to finally get our finances back on stable footing is to set a new course with a new team. Unfortunately, and it pains me to say, the NDP does not share this view. Evidently, the NDP is of the opinion that the best party to govern Ontario is the Liberal Party, which is more than passing strange when you consider

some of the comments made by the third party members at justice committee or here in the Legislature during question period over the last few months.

In a nutshell, the NDP supports the Liberal government—that they're right. But you know what? Dufferin–Caledon does not believe that. Dufferin–Caledon residents are consistently disappointed by the long line of scandals that start with this Liberal government. They cannot believe that after seeing record government revenues, the budget is still far from balanced. They cannot believe that after all the controversy surrounding this cancellation of two gas plants at a cost of hundreds of millions of dollars to the taxpayers, the NDP would still support this government.

In case you want to argue that an election is too expensive, I want to reference a report that the Chief Electoral Officer issues when by-elections are held. A general election in Ontario costs approximately \$92 million. But keep in mind that we already have two vacant seats today, and those by-elections must be held before September, so the Chief Electoral Officer and the government will already be spending over \$1 million on two by-elections this summer—and that's two. If anyone else resigns, if anything else happens, those by-elections still happen, and come September, there are lots of rumours that in fact we go from by-election right into general election. So this is not about saving money for a general election. Only in the strange world of Liberal–NDP accounting would someone possibly venture the notion that we should spend \$1 billion appeasing a political party to avoid spending \$92 million seeking a mandate from Ontarians in a general election. What a shame.

With their budget, the Liberal government has displayed a startling lack of awareness about the most pressing issues of our time, issues like the totally out-of-control spending in our province, issues like the utter lack of accountability that happened at the gas plants, Ornge and eHealth, just to name a few, and issues like the job crisis in our province, where we have seen 300,000 manufacturing jobs disappear under the Liberal government. These changes have been neglected by this government, which has instead tabled a budget with the sole intention of clinging to power at any cost. That is why I believe the government has lost the moral authority to govern, and that is why I do not support this motion.

I want to come back, for a moment, to the 300,000 manufacturing jobs lost under the Liberal government, because I think it's quite relevant to this discussion. This point is relevant because it speaks very strongly to priorities.

Ontario's manufacturing sector has always been an integral part of our economy. They are our job creators. So when you see the industry hit particularly hard over the last number of years, you'd think it would be a priority of the government. Sadly, it is not.

Over the course of the last few months, I have regularly been meeting with local manufacturers, touring their facilities and hearing first-hand the uphill battle they

fight every day to keep up with the mountain of taxes and red tape. It's an eye-opener. Time and time again I hear the same message: "The government isn't listening to us." Considering this Premier's preoccupation with "conversations," I joined Dufferin–Caledon manufacturers in concluding that these are one-way conversations.

About two weeks ago I toured a manufacturing facility in Caledon. I don't want to name names here, but I will say that this particular business is an industry leader in their sector. The company is owned by two partners who bought it together over 20 years ago. At that time, they were doing well in their jobs, but they wanted something more. They had an entrepreneurial spirit and they took a big risk. Twenty-one years and a whole lot of hard work later, they are an industry leader and a strong employer in Dufferin–Caledon.

Both partners' sons actually work in the company, which was a dream of both men when they bought the business all those years ago. Well, you can imagine my surprise and disappointment when this gentleman then relayed to me that he has now, much to his own dismay, felt a responsibility as a father to advise his son that perhaps their field isn't his best bet for a prosperous future. He's moved from a job creator to: "Just find a job away from the red tape." When I asked why, he said very simply, "Because there are increasingly more costs than there are opportunities."

Now, think about that for a moment. Here is a man who has worked day and night for 20 years to build a company, and yet he's looking ahead and doesn't see opportunity on the horizon, but rather more hardship, more red tape, more frustration. That is very dangerous, and it is something that is apparently totally lost on this government.

Ontario manufacturers are competitive, not due to their labour costs or cheap products; they are competitive due to the entrepreneurial drive and ingenuity. The more you tax away opportunities, the more you restrict ingenuity with needless red tape, the more you hurt Ontario manufacturers. After 20 successful but undoubtedly challenging years, this man's spirit is being smothered by excessive government bureaucracy.

His company employs approximately 200 people in Dufferin–Caledon. Is he a multinational corporation? No. Can he afford a division of lobbyists to let the government know what he needs? No. Can he afford an army of lawyers and accountants to sort through the endless and needless red tape that hurts his business? No. But does he represent an absolutely essential part of our economy? Absolutely.

I can tell you that he was waiting to see the direction this government would take with this budget, and you know what? He's also disappointed, he's let down and he's dismayed. He can't understand why the Liberal government expects him to pay more and more taxes and still balance his budget, and yet they can't balance their own. He can't understand why this government seems to have no idea how to restrain spending when he has to do it every single day.

These are the job creators. These are the people that we need to encourage and keep in Ontario if we are going to have good-quality jobs and families happy to be here.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further debate?

Mr. Jim Wilson: When this Liberal government came to office they promised to balance the budget year after year—in fact, every year. These promises continued, year after year, all the way to today, 2013, and now with the introduction of this year's budget we have a document that calls for another \$9.8-billion deficit to add to our already astounding \$280-billion debt, a debt that has more than doubled since the Liberals have been in power.

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Again, similar to the promises the Liberals have made in the past, we have a Liberal finance minister proudly touting a plan that makes another vague commitment to balancing the budget by 2017. Give me a break, Madam Speaker. When you look at the budget documents themselves, there are a few graphs missing, a few gaps in the graphs that don't show us how they are getting from, for example, 2015 through to 2017. Where they're reining in the size and cost of government, we have no idea.

The sad reality is that there is no financial plan in this province that can be relied upon. There has never been, and the proof is in the pudding: billion-dollar deficits and compounding debts. In fact, this year, congratulations to the Liberal government, we will hit \$10 billion in interest payments alone, mostly to foreigners and overseas. People are owed money on their government bonds. Sadly, that now constitutes the third-largest ministry after health care and education—unbelievable.

In the last year alone, the Liberals have snuffed off countless blunders of mismanagement and waste, including investigations into Ornge, eHealth and the politically motivated cancellation of two gas plants.

Since January, they've introduced a whole slew of new taxes: the tire tax, the trades tax, more eco fees, increased WSIB premiums, hydro increases, and the latest proposals, which came from Metrolinx and seem to be embraced by the government: a 1% hike in the HST, five-cent-per-litre increase in gasoline tax, parking levies, more development charges. I mean, the list goes on and on.

To top it off, the latest budget calls for more spending, which can only mean more taxes. In fact, they spent a billion dollars more than planned to buy the NDP support for this Liberal budget.

Saying the so-called Premier—and I say “so-called” Premier because she was never elected Premier, has never been elected Premier—is out of touch with reality is an understatement. The Liberals’ blatant and continued disregard for taxpayers’ money is unacceptable and costing us bigtime.

The gas plant scandals alone cost Ontarians at least \$585 million and growing to a billion; we'll find out what the total cost is probably in late August when the Auditor General comes back with his report. This is money the Liberals diverted from health care and education for purely political reasons, to save the Liberal

Party seats in the last election. The cost of this scandal is equivalent to 2,925 million weeks of groceries for the average family at \$200 per week.

The Ornge scandal cost Ontarians at least \$700 million. With this scandal, the Auditor General revealed that the Liberal government ignored multiple red-flag warnings as early as 2008 over the “deceitful” business practices and its plans to use public funds for their for-profit business ventures at Ornge. The cost of the Ornge scandal is equivalent to tuition for—listen for it—97,493 university students.

The eHealth scandal costs have doubled over the last three years to over \$2 billion, and we don't have electronic health records to show for it. This is despite the Auditor General's scathing 2009 report that revealed the government failed to properly oversee the eHealth initiative. We still have little to nothing, as I said, to show for the spending, as the eHealth projects are either behind schedule, over budget, or non-existent. The cost of this scandal is equivalent to the construction of new hospitals in my riding, in both Collingwood and Alliston, and six others that could have been built throughout Ontario. That's just the eHealth scandal alone. It's a lot of waste that could have been spent in much better ways.

Instead of their being prudent stewards of the province's finances, Premier Kathleen Wynne's Liberal solution, propped up by NDP leader Andrea Horwath and her gang, continues to be more debt and increased fees and taxes. They might not call it a tax—the Liberals are masters at spinning the truth—but a tax is a tax is a tax.

The trades tax was implemented by this Liberal government and came into effect on April 8 of this year. It's expected to cost tradespersons millions in what the Liberals term a “membership fee” to pay for yet another wasteful layer of bureaucracy called the College of Trades. Due to the new fees, local tradespersons, tradespersons all across Ontario and employers are required to pay six times more for the same membership that they may now hold. The College of Trades is proposing to raise tradespersons' fees from approximately \$20 per year to as high as \$200 per year per tradesperson, a 1,000% increase. This of course will have a similar negative implication for consumers who will experience the passed-on costs. The new tax is going to drive up costs, feed the underground economy and discourage jobs and skilled trades, and if it were up to the Ontario PC Party, Tim Hudak and our caucus, the new fees and the College of Trades would be scrapped.

Just ask a constituent of mine, Krista Walcroft, owner of Collingwood Toyota, what she thinks about the new tax. She said, “As an employer of licensed automotive technicians and apprentices, I am not clear on the benefits of this new college. It is becoming more expensive to be a skilled tradesperson, [but] there is no clear explanation why the increases in fees and no indication of what they will receive in return for paying a lot more financially and frequently.”

Or ask Katherine VanLeeuwen, vice-president of the Barrie Construction Association. She said, “We've seen

little or no evidence that this trades tax will have any benefit. It will drive up construction costs in Barrie, feed the underground economy and drive people away from the skilled trades. We joined the campaign” to stop the trades tax “because we can’t afford to let that happen.”

Or ask James, another constituent of mine from Rosemount. In an email, he put it best, I think, Mr. Speaker. He said, “If I graduated from a university and was awarded with a degree, I could carry on and get a job in whatever discipline I wanted relative to the confines of my study. The degree is mine. I never have to pay for renewing it or fees towards some draconian membership, unless I choose to be part of an institute, club or society. So if I am a truck or car mechanic, I serve five years learning the trade, countless hours in school and tireless hours of working until I gradually make the trade. Then I sit exams, get awarded my credentials and I am there. But that trade qualification piece of paper is not yours. It will belong to the College of Trades. Unless you pay an annual fee for that piece of paper, they will deem it to be worthless and can revoke it. In effect you are not a mechanic at all unless you pay your dues to the College of Trades. This is a complete infringement of the rights and privileges of an individual and can deprive you of having a job.” I suggest James is also an excellent writer, if he wanted to go into that field.

Then there is the tire tax that came into effect on April 1. Farmers, along with those in the mining and construction industry, have been hard hit by this increase as it has driven up fees by as much as 2,000%, and it came out of the blue, Mr. Speaker. I was in complete shock when this came in as there was no consultation at all with farmers. It will not only lead to increases in the cost of food for everyone, but creates an uneven playing field with other provinces and the States that don’t have this extra expense.

My constituent, Wayne from Southampton, recently shared his concerns when he said, “This drastic rate increase will unfairly penalize farm businesses by costing them thousands of additional dollars in extra fees each year.... This decision contributes further to the uneven playing field for Ontario farmers who already struggle to compete with farmers in other provinces and the US who do not face similar fees.... This decision will negatively impact farm businesses and farm supply businesses, further suppressing local rural communities by hurting sales and cash flow to small businesses.”

You would think this issue would be very important to the Premier, who is also the Minister of Agriculture and Food—or, should I say, the part-time Minister of Agriculture and Food—but apparently not so, Mr. Speaker. The Premier was not only completely unaware of the increase when my colleague Mr. Bill Walker, the member for Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, raised the issue in this Legislature, but she has done nothing to address the mounting concerns from rural constituents.

Next, we have WSIB rates that are also increasing—the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board. John from Collingwood wrote, “As a small masonry contractor, this

amounts to the government sticking its hand in my pocket to the tune of 15% of my income”—15%; all for what? “I have carried private insurance for about 40 years and never used it, but always felt secure that if the day were to come, it would be there for me.... From experience [as an employer], I have seen that WSIB’s main focus is to assign blame and harass injured employees and not provide coverage.”

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On May 1, hydro rates went up again. Smart meter pricing increased by between 3% and 7%. The list goes on and on, and while Ontarians are paying a lot more money, they are receiving a lot less service. When you think about how many hospitals could have been built with this money that has been wasted on scandals and waste, or how many services could have been funded, it makes you furious.

The Collingwood General and Marine Hospital has had a capital expansion application in to the government since 2004. The planned expansion—badly needed—includes a new wing for ambulatory care and dialysis—our dialysis is jammed to the walls; we cannot put any more dialysis stations in the hospital. The ambulatory care and dialysis units would be renovated and expanded, which would make more room for an emergency department expansion, which is also badly needed. The hospital is projecting a \$500,000 deficit in 2013-14 due to wage increases for unionized staff and a 0% funding increase to cover those wage increases from the government.

Stevenson Memorial Hospital in Alliston has an application in to the Central LHIN for a new emergency department. They are one of only two hospitals in our LHIN that don’t have a multi-million dollar capital project approved or in the planning stages.

I’ve also received a call recently from Orillia’s Soldiers’ Memorial Hospital, where some of my Collingwood residents go. I know that some of our ALC residents—alternate-level-of-care patients in Collingwood—are basically stuck in Soldiers’ Memorial Hospital. Although they do get good care there, they would be more appropriately cared for in a nursing home or at home.

The call from Soldiers’ Memorial Hospital was about funding cuts that will lead to the closure of 20-plus beds and 50-plus staff layoffs, which, they explained, will impact the number of alternate-level-of-care patients in my riding, who often seek residency in the hospital as they wait for a nursing-home bed in a care facility.

The Liberals haven’t built any nursing homes or long-term-care beds. We built 20,000 new beds, and I can remember criticism during our time in office, criticism from the Liberal opposition at that time, saying that we had overbuilt. We also renovated an additional 16,000 nursing-home or long-term-care beds.

I’m told that, as of today, some 24,000 people—mostly seniors, of course—are waiting for a long-term-care bed at a home. It’s one of the longest waiting lists we’ve ever had in the province. Up to 35% of hospital

beds in my area, as I said, are full of ALC patients, who would get, frankly—they get good care, but they would get more appropriate care in a nursing home or long-term-care facility, and the waiting list is years.

That's one of the biggest issues that I know, Mr. Speaker, you face in your riding and we face right across the province, and yet the government cuts physiotherapy services and expects seniors to stay in their homes and the families to be able to care for them when the lineups for CCAC services are unprecedented also. It's totally contrary; if they don't build some more long-term-care beds, people will die at home without the appropriate care. That's not the way we should be heading in a prosperous place like Ontario, where we spend \$127 billion a year, up \$56 billion since 10 years ago, when this government came to office. They've got enough money; they just have to set their priorities over there.

I recently heard, as we all have, from countless constituents concerned about the physiotherapy cuts. According to the Designated Physiotherapy Clinics Association, the cuts are estimated at about a \$44-million reduction in funding; again, without consultation with seniors and without consultation with a number of the associations that provide physiotherapy services or represent physiotherapists.

The fact of the matter is that this is a drastic cut in services, and it doesn't make a lot of sense. Again, it goes contrary to keeping people in their homes, and that may include the long-term-care-home or the retirement home that they're in, or the home that they've lived in prior to, perhaps, going to a retirement home or long-term-care home.

The association indicates that the cuts will reduce services for seniors in long-term-care homes alone by 47% and the number of physiotherapy visits for seniors in retirement homes by 94%. They also note that most seniors will no longer qualify for treatment in their homes, as the new guidelines will force seniors to attend external community clinics. These cuts are shocking, and I'm concerned that this will lead to more falls, more fractures, more respiratory conditions causing hospitalizations and additional costs to the health care system as a whole.

The Liberals are moving physiotherapy service from a low-cost provider in designated physiotherapy clinics to high-cost providers in LHINs and community care access centres. This creates an unnecessary layer of bureaucracy that patients will have to go through to receive the same care from the same provider and will increase the cost per visit, it's estimated, from \$12.20 per visit to \$120 when that care is provided through a community care access centre rather than how it's provided now. Remember, it's well known that community care access centres spend about 35% of the dollars given to them for health care on administration and overhead.

I was at Riverwood Retirement Home in Alliston in my riding last Friday to talk about these issues with residents and local physiotherapists. The residents were irritated that the changes were made by the Liberals

without any stakeholder consultation and that they're still going ahead despite the vast opposition we've seen across the province. According to my local physiotherapist and those who visited Queen's Park today—we had several hundred visit today, and several of us did petitions today on behalf of physiotherapists and their patients—these changes will move treatment from a preventive model that stops falls and keeps people active to a reactive model that treats people after an injury has occurred.

Let me read one letter I received from a local physiotherapist from my riding. He said, "As a health care professional working with seniors over the past five years I have a few issues [with the changes].

His first concern: "The proposed five treatments"—remember, they're going from 100 to 150 treatments per year down to five to 11 treatments per year per senior—"is not an effective treatment model with this type of population. No one will recover in five treatments following a hip fracture or replacement. Even a 20-year-old cannot recover this quickly. The older we get the longer we take to heal. The stamina of an elderly individual is also reduced, and implementing an hour of therapy each session is not practical. Seniors need shorter more frequent doses to get better not five power-hour treatments."

Concern number two that this physiotherapist expressed—he says, "These proposed cuts are based on assumptions and lack of proper research. If we need to reduce spending we should have a discussion with all the stakeholders involved not a single doctor who has made multiple claims without proper research. Our current Liberal government seems to make huge decisions with very little information."

The third concern expressed: "Our seniors are also unaware of the situation and how it will affect them coming August 1. The initial announcement was framed as an increase in spending? Why are" the Liberals "misleading our seniors?"

Number four: "The cuts will be more severe for retirement homes, and this population stands to gain"—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I hesitate to interrupt, but I would ask the member—I caution him on his language, to ensure that it's parliamentary.

Mr. Jim Wilson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll be sure to get back to my constituent and tell him he is restricted from expressing himself because he has to stick to parliamentary language so that I can read his letter out in this House. But I do appreciate your ruling and I believe it is correct.

I'll just wind up, Mr. Speaker. It was a very interesting meeting. Again, the government is saying that they're expanding services. They're not expanding services. Some of these people have a hard time getting from their room down to the dining room for a meal, and now they're expected to go, in my case, several tens of miles outside of Alliston, to either Newmarket or Barrie, to a designated clinic. I don't know who's going to drive them. Who's going to pay for the taxi? You should have been in the room. There were like 50 seniors who were in

the common room at Riverwood Retirement Home last Friday, and they were stunned. They got the message, because CTV from Barrie came and interviewed a number of them, and they talked about how important these services were and how angry they were at this Liberal government, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

Hon. James J. Bradley: Point of order.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Point of order, the Minister of the Environment.

Hon. James J. Bradley: My point of order is this: I want to compliment the member on his calm presentation this afternoon. It's as calm a presentation as I've seen from the member for Simcoe-Grey in all my years in this House.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I'm quite sure that's not a point of order, but it's a point of compliment.

Further debate?

The question is on the amendment to the motion. Mr. Wilson has moved that the motion be amended by adding the following:

“Adding a new section, entitled ‘Section D: Want of Confidence’”—

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I apologize. The question is on the amendment to the amendment. Mr. Hillier has moved that the amendment be amended by adding the following:

“That, in the event of prorogation before the want of confidence motion standing in the name of the member from Simcoe-Grey is called, the motion shall be placed on the Orders and Notices paper on the second day of the subsequent session and shall be called on the fifth sessional day of the new session.”

Is it the pleasure of the House that the amendment to the amendment carry?

All those in favour of the motion, please say “aye.”

All those opposed, please say “nay.”

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

Call in the members. This is a 30-minute bell.

I wish to inform the House that I have received a notice requesting a deferral, which is signed by the chief government whip. Pursuant to standing order 28(h), this vote will be deferred until tomorrow at the time of deferred votes.

Vote deferred.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Orders of the day. I recognize the Attorney General.

Hon. John Gerretsen: Speaker, I move adjournment of the House.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The Attorney General, Mr. Gerretsen, has moved the adjournment of the House. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

This House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 9 a.m.

The House adjourned at 1752.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO
ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

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Clerks-at-the-Table / Greffiers parlementaires: Todd Decker, Tonia Grannum, Trevor Day, Anne Stokes

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Albanese, Laura (LIB)	York South-Weston / York-Sud-Weston	
Armstrong, Teresa J. (NDP)	London-Fanshawe	
Arnott, Ted (PC)	Wellington-Halton Hills	First Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Premier vice-président du comité plénier de l'Assemblée
Bailey, Robert (PC)	Sarnia-Lambton	
Balkissoon, Bas (LIB)	Scarborough-Rouge River	Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Président du comité plénier de l'Assemblée Deputy Speaker / Vice-président
Barrett, Toby (PC)	Haldimand-Norfolk	
Bartolucci, Rick (LIB)	Sudbury	
Berardinetti, Lorenzo (LIB)	Scarborough Southwest / Scarborough-Sud-Ouest	
Best, Margaret R. (LIB)	Scarborough-Guildwood	
Bisson, Gilles (NDP)	Timmins-James Bay / Timmins-Baie James	House Leader, Recognized Party / Leader parlementaire de parti reconnu
Bradley, Hon. / L'hon. James J. (LIB)	St. Catharines	Minister of the Environment / Ministre de l'Environnement Deputy Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint du gouvernement
Brotin, Hon. / L'hon. Laurel C. (LIB)	Etobicoke-Lakeshore	Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs / Ministre des Affaires intergouvernementales Minister Responsible for Women's Issues / Ministre délégué à la Condition féminine
Campbell, Sarah (NDP)	Kenora-Rainy River	
Cansfield, Donna H. (LIB)	Etobicoke Centre / Etobicoke-Centre	
Chan, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (LIB)	Markham-Unionville	Minister of Tourism, Culture and Sport / Ministre du Tourisme, de la Culture et du Sport Minister Responsible for the 2015 Pan and Parapan American Games / Ministre responsable des Jeux panaméricains et parapanaméricains de 2015
Chiarelli, Hon. / L'hon. Bob (LIB)	Ottawa West-Nepean / Ottawa-Ouest-Nepean	Minister of Energy / Ministre de l'Énergie
Chudleigh, Ted (PC)		
Clark, Steve (PC)	Halton	Deputy Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint de l'opposition officielle
Colle, Mike (LIB)	Leeds-Grenville	
Coteau, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (LIB)	Eglington-Lawrence	Minister of Citizenship and Immigration / Ministre des Affaires civiques et de l'Immigration
Crack, Grant (LIB)	Don Valley East / Don Valley-Est	
Craitor, Kim (LIB)	Glengarry-Prescott-Russell	
Damerla, Dipika (LIB)	Niagara Falls	
Del Duca, Steven (LIB)	Mississauga East-Cooksville / Mississauga-Est-Cooksville	
Delaney, Bob (LIB)	Vaughan	
Dhillon, Vic (LIB)	Mississauga-Streetsville	
Dickson, Joe (LIB)	Brampton West / Brampton-Ouest	
DiNovo, Cheri (NDP)	Ajax-Pickering	
Duguid, Hon. / L'hon. Brad (LIB)	Parkdale-High Park	
Dunlop, Garfield (PC)	Scarborough Centre / Scarborough-Centre	Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities / Ministre de la Formation et des Collèges et Universités
Elliott, Christine (PC)	Simcoe North / Simcoe-Nord	
Fedeli, Victor (PC)	Whitby-Oshawa	Deputy Leader, Official Opposition / Chef adjointe de l'opposition officielle
Fife, Catherine (NDP)	Nipissing	
	Kitchener-Waterloo	

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Flynn, Kevin Daniel (LIB)	Oakville	
Forster, Cindy (NDP)	Welland	Deputy House Leader, Recognized Party / Leader parlementaire adjointe de parti reconnu
Gélinas, France (NDP)	Nickel Belt	
Gerretsen, Hon. / L'hon. John (LIB)	Kingston and the Islands / Kingston et les îles	Attorney General / Procureur général
Gravelle, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (LIB)	Thunder Bay-Superior North / Thunder Bay-Superior-Nord	Minister of Northern Development and Mines / Ministre du Développement du Nord et des Mines
Hardeman, Ernie (PC)	Oxford	
Harris, Michael (PC)	Kitchener-Conestoga	
Hillier, Randy (PC)	Lanark-Frontenac-Lennox and Addington	
Horwath, Andrea (NDP)	Hamilton Centre / Hamilton-Centre	Leader, Recognized Party / Chef de parti reconnu Leader, New Democratic Party of Ontario / Chef du Nouveau parti démocratique de l'Ontario
Hoskins, Hon. / L'hon. Eric (LIB)	St. Paul's	Minister of Economic Development, Trade and Employment / Ministre du Développement économique, du Commerce et de l'Emploi
Hudak, Tim (PC)	Niagara West-Glanbrook / Niagara-Ouest-Glanbrook	Leader, Official Opposition / Chef de l'opposition officielle Leader, Progressive Conservative Party of Ontario / Chef du Parti progressiste-conservateur de l'Ontario
Jackson, Rod (PC)	Barrie	
Jaczek, Helena (LIB)	Oak Ridges-Markham	
Jeffrey, Hon. / L'hon. Linda (LIB)	Brampton-Springdale	Chair of Cabinet / Présidente du Conseil des ministres Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing / Ministre des Affaires municipales et du Logement
Jones, Sylvia (PC)	Dufferin-Caledon	
Klees, Frank (PC)	Newmarket-Aurora	
Kwinter, Monte (LIB)	York Centre / York-Centre	
Leal, Hon. / L'hon. Jeff (LIB)	Peterborough	Minister of Rural Affairs / Ministre des Affaires rurales
Leone, Rob (PC)	Cambridge	
Levac, Hon. / L'hon. Dave (LIB)	Brant	Speaker / Président de l'Assemblée législative
MacCharles, Hon. / L'hon. Tracy (LIB)	Pickering-Scarborough East / Pickering-Scarborough-Est	Minister of Consumer Services / Ministre des Services aux consommateurs
MacLaren, Jack (PC)	Carleton-Mississippi Mills	
MacLeod, Lisa (PC)	Nepean-Carleton	
Mangat, Amrit (LIB)	Mississauga-Brampton South / Mississauga-Brampton-Sud	
Mantha, Michael (NDP)	Algoma-Manitoulin	
Marchese, Rosario (NDP)	Trinity-Spadina	
Matthews, Hon. / L'hon. Deborah (LIB)	London North Centre / London-Centre-Nord	Deputy Premier / Vice-première ministre Minister of Health and Long-Term Care / Ministre de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée
Mauro, Bill (LIB)	Thunder Bay-Atikokan	
McDonell, Jim (PC)	Stormont-Dundas-South Glengarry	
McGuinty, Dalton (LIB)	Ottawa South / Ottawa-Sud	
McKenna, Jane (PC)	Burlington	
McMeekin, Hon. / L'hon. Ted (LIB)	Ancaster-Dundas-Flamborough-Westdale	Minister of Community and Social Services / Ministre des Services sociaux et communautaires
McNaughton, Monte (PC)	Lambton-Kent-Middlesex	
McNeely, Phil (LIB)	Ottawa-Orléans	
Meilleur, Hon. / L'hon. Madeleine (LIB)	Ottawa-Vanier	
Miller, Norm (PC)	Parry Sound-Muskoka	
Miller, Paul (NDP)	Hamilton East-Stoney Creek / Hamilton-Est-Stoney Creek	Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services / Ministre de la Sécurité communautaire et des Services correctionnels Minister Responsible for Francophone Affairs / Ministre délégué aux Affaires francophones
Milligan, Rob E. (PC)	Northumberland-Quinte West	Third Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Troisième vice-président du comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Milloy, Hon. / L'hon. John (LIB)	Kitchener Centre / Kitchener-Centre	Minister of Government Services / Ministre des Services gouvernementaux Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire du gouvernement

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Moridi, Hon. / L'hon. Reza (LIB)	Richmond Hill	Minister of Research and Innovation / Ministre de la Recherche et de l'Innovation
Munro, Julia (PC)	York-Simcoe	Second Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Deuxième vice-présidente du comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Murray, Hon. / L'hon. Glen R. (LIB)	Toronto Centre / Toronto-Centre	Minister of Infrastructure / Ministre de l'Infrastructure
Naqvi, Hon. / L'hon. Yasir (LIB)	Ottawa Centre / Ottawa-Centre	Minister of Transportation / Ministre des Transports
Natyshak, Taras (NDP)	Essex	Minister of Labour / Ministre du Travail
Nicholls, Rick (PC)	Chatham-Kent-Essex	
O'Toole, John (PC)	Durham	
Orazietti, Hon. / L'hon. David (LIB)	Sault Ste. Marie	Minister of Natural Resources / Ministre des Richesses naturelles
Ouellette, Jerry J. (PC)	Oshawa	
Pettapiece, Randy (PC)	Perth-Wellington	
Piruzza, Hon. / L'hon. Teresa (LIB)	Windsor West / Windsor-Ouest	Minister of Children and Youth Services / Ministre des Services à l'enfance et à la jeunesse
Prue, Michael (NDP)	Beaches-East York	
Qaadir, Shafiq (LIB)	Etobicoke North / Etobicoke-Nord	
Sandals, Hon. / L'hon. Liz (LIB)	Guelph	Minister of Education / Ministre de l'Éducation
Schein, Jonah (NDP)	Davenport	
Scott, Laurie (PC)	Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock	
Sergio, Hon. / L'hon. Mario (LIB)	York West / York-Ouest	Minister Responsible for Seniors / Ministre délégué aux Affaires des personnes âgées
Shurman, Peter (PC)	Thornhill	Minister Without Portfolio / Ministre sans portefeuille
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**Legislative Assembly
of Ontario**

Second Session, 40th Parliament

**Assemblée législative
de l'Ontario**

Deuxième session, 40^e législature

**Official Report
of Debates
(Hansard)**

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

Wednesday 5 June 2013

Mercredi 5 juin 2013



Speaker
Honourable Dave Levac

Président
L'honorable Dave Levac

Clerk
Deborah Deller

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Wednesday 5 June 2013

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Mercredi 5 juin 2013

The House met at 0900.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Good morning. Please join me in prayer.

Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

STRONGER PROTECTION FOR ONTARIO CONSUMERS ACT, 2013

LOI DE 2013 RENFORÇANT LA PROTECTION DU CONSOMMATEUR ONTARIEN

Resuming the debate adjourned on May 15, 2013, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 55, An Act to amend the Collection Agencies Act, the Consumer Protection Act, 2002 and the Real Estate and Business Brokers Act, 2002 and to make consequential amendments to other Acts / Projet de loi 55, Loi modifiant la Loi sur les agences de recouvrement, la Loi de 2002 sur la protection du consommateur et la Loi de 2002 sur le courtage commercial et immobilier et apportant des modifications corrélatives à d'autres lois.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Further debate? The member from Durham.

Mr. John O'Toole: I was so pleased this morning to be advised that I was going to be given an opportunity—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Sorry, member from Durham, I've been advised of a different rotation. Thank you. If you could take your seat.

Questions and comments from the speech given by the member from Kenora–Rainy River? Questions and comments.

Hon. John Gerretsen: Good morning, Speaker. Although I wasn't here to listen to the debate from the member from Kenora–Rainy River, I read a bit of the Hansard. But I want to talk about the speech that she gave on the budget a couple of days ago. As a matter of fact, I sent her a congratulatory note at that time because I think that's well worth—

Interjection.

Hon. John Gerretsen: Are we okay, Speaker?

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I have to confess that the member identified the fact that he read part of the Hansard, and I would ask him to stay focused on the bill that we are talking about. That would be very helpful.

Hon. John Gerretsen: Thank you very much, Speaker. You know, I always thought it was nice to pay com-

pliments to members in the House regardless of what side of the House they're on. There's so much negativity in the House from time to time—on all sides—that it's nice to say something. Anyway, she gave an excellent speech, and I would hope that people would read that.

But dealing with Bill 55, the Stronger Protection for Ontario Consumers Act, this is an initiative that was actually brought forward a number of years ago by a then Minister of Consumer Services. We won't say who it was.

Hon. James J. Bradley: Name names.

Hon. John Gerretsen: No, I will not name names.

I think that all of these initiatives that the good minister that we have there now has brought forward are really in the interest of the consumers. They are all about consumer protection. They are about consumer protection from door-to-door sales individuals—and there's a role for them; there is a role for door-to-door salesmen. I'm not going to condemn them all. But there should be a cooling-off period, particularly for the elderly in our society who may, at times, feel that they might have been taken advantage of. That's why the cooling-off period that this bill calls for with respect to the sale, for example, of water heaters. As well, there are other initiatives in the bill that deal with improving the rules to protect buyers and sellers of real estate. Having been involved in the real estate business for many years as a lawyer, I know that greater protections are required on both sides of that issue, so there's a cooling-off period as well in that particular regard in many instances.

This is a good bill, and if any bill cries out for support from all sides of the House to better protect the consumers of Ontario, this is the bill. I would urge all the members to vote for it, and congratulations to the member from Kenora–Rainy River.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Further questions and comments?

Mr. John O'Toole: I was here on May 15, when the member from Kenora–Rainy River made her remarks. As I recall, she was very concerned specifically about the provision on the hot water heaters. This issue is, I think, a good start with aggressive salespeople who, either on the phone or standing on your doorstep, want to sell you some product you may or may not know, but they're making you think you should buy it.

In this bill, there's the provision of a cooling-off period. I think we would agree with the necessity to have a cooling-off period so that you can have sober second thought on some of the decisions you may have made. But it doesn't expunge the responsibility of the consumer

to be informed. An old expression is, “Buyer beware.” If the deal sounds too good to be true, it probably is too good to be true. That is good advice. I think it’s advice in any respect. I think of the pages here and people like that. Experience is the greatest teacher.

In this case, I hope to have an opportunity this morning to speak on this bill, because it does, in the best sense, talk to three issues that most members here would hear about. I think the provision under the loan-sharking or debt settlement business is one that—in my riding, just down the street, is one of those payday loan type offices, which I’m not a real big supporter of, although people do get into a cash crunch. They’re often the most vulnerable, and there do need to be some rules around that.

I’d say the group that I don’t really hear a lot about is the real estate brokers. Although it’s a very, very productive part of the economy in Ontario, with house sales and all that, there always needs to be consumer protection in all things we do in this Legislature.

I commend the member from Kenora–Rainy River and look forward to her two-minute response.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Further questions and comments?

Mr. Michael Mantha: I need to commend my colleague from Kenora–Rainy River. When she gave her comments and her words to this debate, I was here for part of it, and I went back to the office and, like a diligent representative, I sat down and watched the remainder of it.

Some of the biggest points I heard is something that both of us share. We have similar backgrounds as far as what we did before we came here: We actually sat with individuals and assisted them. We know the frustration they go through. We understand that sometimes there is the shame of those individuals. They don’t want to divulge the information to their family members because they get a sense, “If I tell anybody, I’ll be laughed at or I’ll be embarrassed at telling people about it.” So sometimes they hide, and we don’t get to help those people.

But through the jobs and functions and the initiatives we had, we were able to pull that information from those individuals. So we have learned first-hand of the benefit we can actually be in assisting these individuals in, first, identifying the problem; two, fixing the problem; and, three, hopefully getting some type of remedy out of it.

Both of us as well have a very large First Nations presence, and a lot of them, along with a lot of other communities in northern Ontario, were extremely taken advantage of when it comes to hydro. Unfortunately, we didn’t see that. If you were here and you had been listening, you would have noticed that very much part and the root of the comments she was making is the cost of hydro and individuals who are being taken advantage of and the aggressive pitches that are being thrown to these communities, especially targeted communities when it comes to seniors.

0910

So I commend the member for the words and the debate that she brought forward. It’s always a pleasure sit-

ting by her side, shoulder to shoulder, because I do know that we share a lot of the same problems and the same issues throughout both of our ridings.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The Minister of Consumer Services.

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: If I may, Speaker—I guess it’s a point of order—I want to introduce someone very, very important to me, an important member of my family. My sister, Jill MacCharles-Crain, from Ajax is here. She has been with me through thick and thin. I just want to thank her for being here today.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): I’ll remind the member it’s not really a point of order, but for you I’ll let it go.

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: Thank you, Speaker. I appreciate it very much.

Hon. Jeff Leal: Mr. Speaker, you’re mellowing.

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: Yes, indeed, he is, and that’s wonderful.

Bill 55: I am obviously very keen about this, as the Minister of Consumer Services. I’m very pleased to hear how supportive everyone seems to be about standing up for consumers in Ontario. When we stand up for consumers in Ontario, we improve consumer confidence, and when we improve consumer confidence, that helps the economy. It’s just very important.

The specific measures in this bill are responding to what we know to be serious issues in the marketplace: door-to-door sales with respect to water heaters; debt settlement companies; and some improvements on real estate transactions that will make it better and more competitive in terms of how fees are constructed for real estate agents and brokers. It will bring us on par, quite frankly, with the rest of Canada. Also, it will deal with the phantom bidding situation that, unfortunately, sometimes arises when people are buying a house and they hear about these phantom biddings and the price goes up. But do these phantom bids really exist? So the component of the bill with respect to the bidding will just require confirmation about the number of phantom bids that exist.

This is all to say that these are very important measures. They are responsive to documented facts in cases of consumer issues and complaints. At the end of the day, I just hope all parties work together to move this forward.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Kenora–Rainy River has two minutes.

Ms. Sarah Campbell: I would like to thank the Attorney General, the member from Durham, the member from Algoma–Manitoulin and the Minister of Consumer Services for their comments on my debate. I know that it may have been difficult to weigh in a little bit, because I think I spoke a few weeks ago, but I appreciate it nevertheless. Quite candidly, I appreciate the comments made by the Attorney General. I might have to review my notes, because it’s a little concerning that he’s giving me those accolades.

Back to the bill: As the Minister of Consumer Services said, she’s standing up for consumers in Ontario. I would

just like to caution her a little bit. It's true that this bill is a step in the right direction; it is doing some positive things. I think the intent is there, but it really falls short. As the member from Algoma-Manitoulin mentioned, it really falls short in the area of energy retailers. That's something that I spent the vast majority of my time talking about: all of the people who I have talked to in Kenora-Rainy River who have found themselves, one way or another, locked into these really long, really painful and really unaffordable energy contracts.

The problem that I have with this bill is that it is modelled after the protections that are in place when it comes to energy retailers. If that is the model, we're in trouble for this bill, because the Ontario Energy Board releases a top-10 list of complaints that are brought forward to the energy board, especially with respect to energy retailers. Time and time again, the top 10 issues are miscellaneous contract issues, cancellation charges that are being unfairly applied or are way too high, despite the legislation. We need to go further, and we need to take a serious look at the protections that are in place for other things.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Further debate?

Mr. John O'Toole: I appreciate the opportunity this morning to say a few words on Bill 55. Bill 55 was introduced by Minister MacCharles, the Minister of Consumer Services—welcome to her sister here, as well—on April 18. I don't think it was much before that that she was sworn in as minister.

I think it is the right thing to do. At the end of the day, you can't argue with the general concept and the idea here of consumer protection. Some would say, "A little too little." Some would say, "A little too late." These are only comments, of course. Our job as opposition is to be opposed in some sort of constructive way.

Now, you look at the bill itself. There really are three provisions. This may be just for the viewer. Most people here are very familiar with this bill.

I'm a bit surprised, actually, that it's here this morning. We're very close to the end of the session. There's co-operative housing and there are a few other bills on food safety and local food and lots of issues that are out there that aren't really resolved. I'm a bit surprised that this bill would poke its head up here this morning. I'm not sure if it will actually go anywhere beyond this provision of second reading.

I know that the NDP have been talking about the issue with respect to, in a general sense, the issue of consumer protection. That's probably a decent way to start, because consumer protection in Ontario—it's not just the water heaters. One of the things we hear about during the winter is the high cost of energy, the high cost of electricity. Now, if you want to protect the consumers in Ontario, you'd have to look more broadly than just the hot water heater. If the government was really progressive, they would look at one of the largest appliances consuming electricity in the home: the hot water heater. It's like

boiling a 40-litre or a 40-gallon kettle all the time. Think about it. What a wasteful use of energy.

In fact, there are products out there. There are in-line hot water heaters; there are solar heaters. Some countries mandate that you heat your hot water through solar. Israel is a case in point. There are other cases; I believe parts of Australia have the same thing. The point I'm making is that rather than just come up with this idea that they're going to let these people stop knocking on your door to sell you a new hot water heater, why don't they bring in a new product?

Why wouldn't they, on this new home renovation tax credit they have—which is another game entirely. Why wouldn't they allow them to save their—because seniors—you know this yourself, Mr. Speaker. I've heard you speak of it—passionately, I might add. Seniors, in their home, are finding that they can't stay there. In fact, the Liberals have a plan called Aging at Home. We actually call the plan "aging alone," because there's no home care, really—a couple of hours a day.

But here's the issue: They could have that person knocking on the door and saying, "Look, I could save you \$50 a month if you invest, say, \$2,500 in this in-line hot water heater. You could save \$50 a month." That would be a progressive move. That would be consumer protection. That would be protecting the person of modest income.

I can't disagree: There has been some very aggressive information with respect to the retailers in electricity and the other subsidiary companies of these local utilities that sell these appliances like hot water tanks and stuff like that, I, in fact, replaced mine.

Then, when you look at it, there are other options there too. That's just one topic. I wish I had an hour, because there's so much in this bill that I could talk about. But here's the issue: On the hot water, then you have the choice. Do you want to heat the water with electricity—very, very inefficient—or with natural gas? What's wrong with that?

Hon. John Gerretsen: That's the way to go.

Mr. John O'Toole: Exactly. Gas was negatively priced a few months ago. I could diverge onto that. That's a different topic too, because I'm not in favour of fracking gas—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Sit down, please.

I'd like it a little bit quieter, please. I've got about six or seven different conversations going. The member from Durham is very, very easy to hear, and I'm having trouble hearing him.

Continue.

Mr. John O'Toole: Thank you very much for that kind interruption, if that's possible.

I guess the point is that I would probably encourage and educate the consumers. This is what the government could do: Educate the consumers on some of these options about having an efficient use of hot water heaters in your home.

0920

Then I ask, if they're going to do this protection thing, how are they actually going to enforce it? They're going to have to set up a bureaucracy, something like the LHINs, to take care of enforcing these consumer protection provisions. They'll have to have a new office building built and hire several inspectors with cars to travel around the province checking. See, this is what happens when government implements things. It frightens me, actually, that part of the bill.

Now, I won't trivialize it by going on too much more on that, because I think that debt settlement is another thing. Now, you can't put them out of business, but they could make access to credit for people that are in trouble—I think governments could do a better job there as well. In fact, I think by starting early, improving the education, the budgeting information in our schools—use of money, use of credit should be a core component of education in schools. I think of the young pages here, who are probably in grade 8. We thought they were finished this week, but they're going to be here next week, I hope, because they've done a great job. When they go back, some of them are going to have to write exams. I wonder, if they're in grade 8, if they're going to take courses next year about consumer protection. This is about learning how to use credit wisely.

Once you're in this dilemma of going to these payday loan places—I just say the debt settlement issue is very prominent in the media and advertising stories about loan sharks, and customers taken to the cleaners are likely to be widely reported. I would suggest it's a good thing to report, because there are often shady circumstances in those situations.

I see advertisements on television that you get \$200 for \$20. Wait a minute. They mean \$20 a day. You get \$200, but they're going to charge you \$20 a day, and in 10 days, you'll owe them \$400. You still owe them the \$200, but you're going to owe them—so this is the unreasonable level. I think in the plain-language legislation, they should put a peak or a cap on the amount of interest that is charged. That's called debt or rent; it's actually called rent of capital.

So those are the three provisions in this bill, very briefly, the three sections of the bill dealing with consumer protection: on the hot water heaters, primarily with a cooling-off period; and then on the debt collection agencies, it's rules for the debt settlers, debt settlement they call it; and the real estate is abolishing commission and fee restrictions.

Now, that's another area where I think they're a pretty disciplined group, but the real estate brokers act has two significant components if you look at it. One of them is, first of all, it's a disclosure piece. What that means is the real estate agent can't work on both ends of the deal, as I see it. They have an inherent conflict, and they should disclose these conflicts to you. I'm not making any specific—but also the provision of tied selling. If the real estate agent says you should have a planner come into your home to stage the house, and, "I've got this very

good friend of mine who can do that for you," that staging the house part, and now you should also have this home inspection done—if they're tied to these other transactional things, I think we should be very clear about these tied selling provisions, if you follow me. This is not in there. I'm disappointed in that.

In fact, I'd like to see the bill go to committee, because I have several ideas that I want to bring forward as amendments. I know our critic has as well.

I wish I was the critic of this ministry. In fact it turns out I'm not the critic of any ministry at the moment, but that could be explained at another time. I would suspect that I have way too much criticism on almost everything that goes on here, especially when I read the clippings today. I'll just summarize this, Speaker—you'll allow me, I'm sure—the "Liberals Leave the Door Open on Proposed Fees." This concerns me. I want to protect the taxpayers of Ontario, and that's what our leader, Tim Hudak, is saying every day during question period.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Order. Questions and comments? The Minister of Rural Affairs.

Hon. Jeff Leal: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. It's always a delight for me to listen to the member from Durham. Gosh, he's talking about clippings. I'm just reading a clipping here, "Hudak Cools on Doug Ford PC Run," an interesting comment today.

Mr. Speaker, I've got to get back to Bill 55. It's interesting: I remember the last two years I was city councillor in Peterborough—that would be in 2001 and 2002. In the ward that I represented, there were a lot of seniors in the south end of Peterborough. Many of them didn't have any family in Peterborough, and people would be knocking on their doors or calling them non-stop. They were fast-talking individuals with their clipboards and their contracts, really putting enormous pressure on seniors to sign on.

I would get probably 20 or 25 calls a week, as the local city councillor. My advice was this: Don't sign anything. I would often tell them to stick with the Peterborough Utilities Services, which was owned by the city of Peterborough, a public utility. If you wanted water heaters, be it electric or gas, stick with them, because they were a very reliable organization.

The Minister of Consumer Affairs for the province of Ontario, the Honourable Tracy MacCharles, deserves a lot of credit for bringing this legislation forward, because I think that all of us in our constituency offices know this is probably the number one complaint: door-to-door salesmen, whether they have any background or not, trying to get people to sign these contracts. People get into contracts, and then they read the fine print and find out that they shouldn't have been involved in this contract at all. I know it also happens in Hamilton East-Stoney Creek, Mr. Speaker, so I know you're well aware of this problem. This will also clean up the debt services.

I want to thank you, Mr. Speaker, for getting a couple of thoughts on the record this morning.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Mr. Rick Nicholls: It's a privilege to speak to this particular bill. I always admire the member from Durham, when he gets up and speaks, just how articulate he is and how knowledgeable he is. Of course, he's been here in this chamber for a number of years now, and we always admire what he has to say.

When we talk about this particular bill, a couple of things come to mind. He mentioned the words "buyer beware." I remember, back in my high school days when we took Latin, it was "caveat emptor." On these kinds of issues, I really do think, feel and believe that consumers really need to be aware that there are some shady people out there. A lot of times these door-to-door salesmen will prey—that's P-R-E-Y—on some of our most vulnerable people in our communities, and that would even be our seniors, because seniors are far more trusting and understanding. As a result, they find after a while that they have in fact signed an agreement and they go, "My goodness, what have I done?"

I'll give you an example of that. Years ago, I used to work for just a tremendous organization down in the Chatham-Kent area, Union Gas—well, it was Union Gas. There would be other natural gas companies coming into our city to get people to sign up. You would show them your bill, and the first thing they did was record your account number. The next thing you know, they're transferring it over and you don't have any idea.

But there's another concern that I have as well, and that is that right now, down in our area, we have these industrial wind turbine salespeople coming along. In Chatham-Kent we probably have well over 300 industrial wind turbines. These salespeople—I often say you're only as good as your last sale—will go into a farmer's kitchen, sit down, give them the quick overview of these contracts and what the contracts are all about. People sign, not knowing what they're signing, and then regret it afterward.

Thank you very much, Speaker, for the opportunity to speak to this bill.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Mr. Jonah Schein: I'm happy to join the debate on Bill 55, the consumer protection act. Speaker, this is an issue that affects people in my community. What we're talking about, in many ways, is perhaps the kind of predatory salesperson. I would say that part of this is systemic, though. This is about the economy that we've created, in which more and more workers are actually desperate just to make a buck and pay the bills. Unfortunately, we're opening up new markets where people are stooping to new lows in terms of taking advantage of people. I think that's the bigger lens that we should look at this in, in that we need to actually create good jobs and not these kinds of jobs in the same sense.

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But, Speaker, it is about protecting consumers at the end of the day. In my riding of Davenport, often the consumers that are being taken advantage of are seniors, and it's often seniors with language barriers. I think we do need to make sure that we're moving this bill into committee, to look at it closely and to also make sure that we are protecting folks for whom English is not their first language, and to make sure that we have a really strong consumer advocate who is going to make sure that, whether your first language is Spanish or Portuguese or Italian or Vietnamese, you have somebody on your side to look at these things and to support you if you are taken advantage of.

We've seen this in a number of ways in my riding. I've been working on something with my federal counterpart, Andrew Cash; we call it pay-to-pay. Right now, some of the biggest corporations, Rogers and Bell, are actually charging people an extra couple of bucks to receive their bill. We call it pay-to-pay because you're paying to pay your bill. This is absolutely unfair, and it's taking advantage of seniors who are not online and are still paying their bills by paper. These big companies are taking advantage of this. This is just another example of why consumers definitely need protection and why we need to have this discussion and send this to committee.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Hon. James J. Bradley: This is a very positive bill that I think should have the support, if I were guessing, of a Legislature which is looking objectively and independently at legislation that comes forward, because it responds, I think, to some very legitimate complaints that all of us have heard through our constituency offices in a variety of fields, particularly high-pressure door-to-door sales. I was pleased when the minister provided some information to the House on this and eventually gave her speech on this particular bill.

I think I detected, in the member's remarks, support for the principle of this particular bill: first of all, better protecting indebted consumers from predatory debt settlement services, which are a genuine problem, again, particularly for people in a vulnerable position.

Installed items such as water heaters are always a problem. I mean, we seem to get a rash of calls on these. We try to follow up for people, but it's clear that legislation is required.

Again, in the field of real estate, the changes that are made, I think, are positive, and they'll be supported by people in the real estate community who recognize that their best foot forward is when legitimate, good people in the field—and there are so many of them—are following the same rules that others, who might not want to follow those rules if there were not such legislation, are involved in.

I also note that this legislation has had some debate in the House. I would hope it can move to committee quickly and this legislation could be passed in this particular session. That's always a hope that I have.

Last, I would say, the member—because I'm responding to his speech—talked about user fees. I can assure you, Mr. Speaker, there was no government that imposed more user fees than the Harris Conservative government.

Hon. John Gerretsen: Some 985.

Hon. James J. Bradley: I said 978.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Durham has two minutes to reply.

Mr. John O'Toole: I was wondering if I could have unanimous consent for 10 minutes for the response, just a brief extension. Would that be unanimous consent?

Interjection: No.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): You're out of luck.

Mr. John O'Toole: Okay. Well, look, I'll just thank the member from Peterborough, who's a good friend of mine—he's now more advanced; he's the Minister of Agriculture—the member from Chatham-Kent-Essex, who is always eloquent and informed, I would say; the member from Davenport, a strong advocate; as well as the Minister of the Environment.

Now, the Minister of the Environment—I did listen closely. I was expecting, in consumer protection, that he might cancel the Drive Clean program today, here and now. I might have thought that. That would protect the consumers of Ontario.

Interjections.

Mr. John O'Toole: It's a cash grab. What they're doing, it's a cash grab, though. No, it's clear that the program—the Auditor General—

Interjections.

Mr. John O'Toole: Look, I know I've struck a nerve. I know that. I've touched a sensitive nerve.

The other thing I thought the Minister of the Environment might have talked about was cancelling the transformer station in my riding. He knows that I've been advocating for months on this.

Interjection: This has nothing to do with the bill.

Mr. John O'Toole: Well, the bill is consumer protection. I think the taxpayers of Ontario need the protection. That's why Tim Hudak and our party are always asking questions that are defending the taxpayers of Ontario. They simply can't afford to live in Ontario anymore. That's part of it.

But in fairness to this bill, in conclusion, I would say there is clarity in a couple of them. One of them is the real estate brokers act. I would suggest, for example, a house today sells for \$500,000—I've never lived in a house like that, of course; a more modest home would be more in line. But let's say there was a million-dollar home. A \$50,000 commission? How about a straight cash deal where I say, "Look, I'll give you 10 grand to sell the house"? That is permitted in this bill.

Interjection.

Mr. John O'Toole: Well, look, I say in business, and this is my advice to the pages, always look for the best deal.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Further debate?

Miss Monique Taylor: I'm pleased to stand on behalf of the residents of Hamilton Mountain and speak to this bill. I think it's an important bill. I think that we definitely have a lot of work to do in this province in protecting our consumers, because they are the taxpayers of this province, and they're constantly dishing out of their pockets on a regular basis. When they have things come across their plates that they just can't control in life, they definitely need some help. Hopefully, this bill will move those things forward.

I have to say the bill definitely doesn't go far enough, but it will get my support in the hopes that we can get it to committee to make sure that we can make some changes to it.

This bill deals with collection agencies, and they've become a big problem. You can actually watch them on TV these days. They give out a phone number and say, "If you're in trouble, call this number, and we'll loan you the money." Well, that doesn't really give people an opportunity to read a contract. Unfortunately, that's another big problem: People don't read all the way through a contract to see what is actually in the fine print. But when you have that easy access to just pick up the phone and say, "I need a loan," then having that money deposited directly into your account—they're also withdrawing directly from your account at the same time to make sure that they get that collection. It's putting people further and further behind, which is an absolute disgrace.

Collection agencies also want upfront fees. If I'm in trouble and I'm behind on money, how am I possibly going to pay an upfront fee? That's again going to put me further in debt. That's a big concern from us. We need to make sure that bills like this are prohibiting things like that.

Cancelling an agreement without reason within a 10-day period after receiving a copy of the agreement: That is a good provision that would, I'm sure, help a lot of folks. But it also makes me question, if we're cancelling the agreement within a 10-day period, are they getting their money for that loan within that 10-day period, or do they have to wait for it? I'm not sure if we're going to cancel an agreement after I've already been given the loan. That's something that's going to have to be looked at.

It would prohibit misleading sales practices and advertising—absolutely important. Like I said, when it came to the commercials that are rapidly happening across this province with fancy-dancy songs leading people—they're going to save the day for them and make sure they get that money they need.

If companies fail to follow these new rules, the new legislation would enable the revocation of their mandatory licences. I think that's absolutely important. We know that there are collection agencies out there that are getting your money up front. There's not even necessarily the fact that your problems are going to be resolved, so there's no assurance that what you're paying for is actually going to happen. We need to make sure that that's taken care of.

Water heaters: Schedule 2 attempts to curb aggressive door-to-door water heater rental sales tactics. Again, it's doubling the existing 10-day cooling-off period to 20 days for water heaters, which provides consumers with more time to consider their decision. That's an absolutely great idea. But I hope that I don't need a water heater in a really big hurry and have to wait 20 days, so I'm interested in hearing how that would work out.

0940

Banning delivery and installation of water heaters during the 20-day cooling period: If I am in need of a water heater within 20 days, I don't think I'm going to get it under these new provisions. Hopefully, there will be some emergency timelines in there to make sure that it's getting us through that.

Allowing rules requiring companies to confirm sales by making scripted and recorded telephone calls to the consumer, and that key contract terms are disclosed and clear, in easy-to-understand language: I think that's absolutely important. When we're dealing with door-to-door salesmen, they can be very aggressive on the door. I know, myself, I've pushed people off my doorstep pretty quickly, or tried pretty quickly. It didn't quite happen. He was pretty aggressive. He just kept coming back at me with different reasons of energy, and that's exactly what it was about. It wasn't about a water heater; it was about energy.

Something that people are very concerned about in this province is the high cost of hydro rates, so when someone is coming to you and saying, "It's going to be a 5% discount on your hydro, and we're going to make sure that your bills are lower"—and I've heard it from several other members through this debate, about the cost of energy and door-to-door people trying to convince you. You know, they do convince our vulnerable residents, people with language barriers, our seniors to sign on to these contracts, and then people are stuck and they're not able to get out.

I know, myself, when I was working with a city councillor, how many people had called me and said, "I'm paying energy—my hydro has gone up to \$350," and here they had signed a contract, not realizing, thinking that their hydro was going to be lower. Thankfully, some of those folks were seniors and I was able to get them out of those contracts. But we have people with language barriers who just don't fall under that criteria, and they're stuck. So we need to make sure that we're protecting our folks when it comes to these door-to-door salesmen.

I also think that it's really important that we're confirming these sales through a phone process, so that people are aware and they're prepared that somebody is going to be knocking on their door, making that appointment, so that people at least can think about what these folks are coming to visit them about.

Making sure that there is a scripted and recorded telephone call to that customer is really important, so that we are clear, when the person is showing up at our door, that we know that the exact terms of what they're coming to visit us for are there. That's a really important thing.

Water heaters: The ministry received more than 3,200 written complaints and inquiries about door-to-door water heater people in 2012, making this the second-largest source of consumer complaints in the province. That's absolutely disconcerting, that people in this province are facing this. I would like to see numbers of how many complaints actually went forward with energy people on our doorsteps. I really hope, when this goes to committee, that we are looking at other industries that need to be included in this and not just water heaters, because we know that it's happening with many other industries.

I think that having a consumer advocate in this province would absolutely benefit people, and it would help with language barriers. It would help with our seniors. It would give people an avenue of where to take their complaints to, because people just don't know. I know that our offices are inundated with these types of calls, and without this proper legislation, we're not quite sure what to do with them either. We call their offices, we advocate, we do our darnedest to try to get people out of these contracts, but they're just not interested. They're more interested in the money that they're receiving. Having a consumer advocate would give that avenue of a voice and where to go, because we know that going through legal aid services and trying to go that route is time-consuming. It's backlogging our court systems, and that's really where it shouldn't be—maybe as the final stage. But up until that point, having somebody there to advocate on behalf of folks is absolutely vital.

I'm not sure if I mentioned already that I was contacted by one of our city councillors in Hamilton and was told that within the next two years, we would have a 33% increase to our hydro rates. I think this is something that we need to be looking at. I know that it's a little bit off-topic here, but it's in the benefit of our consumers, in the benefit of our taxpayers in this province. It's something that seriously needs to be looked at.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Mr. Bill Mauro: I want to thank the member from Hamilton Mountain for her comments.

I'm happy to have a couple of minutes today to speak briefly on Bill 55, the Stronger Protection for Ontario Consumers Act, and thank Minister MacCharles, our Minister of Consumer Services, for bringing this piece forward.

Speaker, like most people in the Legislature, I think all of us—certainly me, in my riding of Thunder Bay-Atikokan—our constituency offices are likely the best place where we as members in this assembly can get the sense and the feel for what issues are of importance, what issues are percolating from the ground up and becoming very serious in our local communities, and issues related to consumer protection are at the forefront of this.

After being elected in 2003, I remember when very early on we began to see issues related to consumer protection walking in the door. I have to give a nod to a couple of my staff in my constituency office, Sharla

Knapton and Karen O'Connor, who have worked diligently over the years. I would suggest we have been able to help, in a very large way, many—unfortunately, primarily our seniors—who have been affected by these issues, where these very aggressive door-to-door salesmen are knocking on their doors and creating a lot of heartache.

The bill deals with not just the door-to-door sales piece, although that is primarily the focus. It also deals with debt settlement services. It deals with real estate, consumer protections, phantom offers, and it deals with à la carte services. So it is really progressive, and it really is necessary.

I think the first time that anybody in the Legislature did anything on this issue, it was a former member of ours, a Liberal member, David Ramsay, who's no longer with us. David retired in the last election. I remember David introducing a private member's bill some five or six years ago, which I really think began the momentum in terms of us on the government side getting more done to protect our seniors when it comes to consumer protection issues related to very aggressive door-to-door salespeople.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Mr. Jim McDonell: I'm pleased to rise to comment on the comments made by the member from Hamilton Mountain. No question, there needs to be some legislation for consumer protection.

One of the problems we have with this bill is the 20-day cooling-off period. Many times that's warranted, but I can't help but think of the person who has a problem with a hot water heater and needs it done tomorrow. I think there need to be some amendments brought in that would allow that to happen without the installer taking on 100% of the risk. Sometimes people install things because they need them today, and I think this bill has to reflect that—without having to go back to the original installer if they choose not to.

As well, we have some issues with the cancellation of existing agreements. That hasn't been dealt with. We see that many of the complaints that come in were actually of that nature, where people called, after a long-term contract, having problems getting out of it—in many cases, what seems to be maybe bogus damage fees. After 20 years, you're going to throw these things out, so why do you charge for a scratch on the side of it?

We're hoping to get this back to committee.

When we talk about the debt settlement—still, some of these agencies that are supposedly on your side are taking commissions back from the debtors. I think we have to look at some of the groups. I think if that's going to happen, the consumer has to know and he has to approve it. It's one thing for the person to be making the fees up front, but if he's also hired by somebody, he's going to get fees from the person that he's supposed to be working for. You have wonder about that.

Anyway, we're looking forward to getting this to committee and making some changes.

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The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Algoma-Manitoulin.

Mr. Michael Mantha: I'm pleased to rise again and talk to the bill that we're looking at, protecting our consumers. I want to thank the member from Thunder Bay-Atikokan. He reminded me of something that we should all do here as elected representatives: to recognize our staff back home, and also in our offices that we have here, because they're the ones who actually deal with the face-to-face interactions. They're the ones who are not only social workers, psychologists, a vast resource of experience; they are extremely important to each and every one of us as far as us doing our own functioning here in our offices. I want to send my thank you to my staff, who are Cindy Restoule, Cindy Haddow—who is new to my team—along with Grant Buck, and my executive assistance who I have here, Claire Prashaw. They do amazing work. They are so compassionate and empathetic when they listen to individuals—and the importance of the work that they do, which is consumer protection.

This is a great step forward, and I look forward to having those discussions over in committee. Again, I need to stress the fact that not everybody in this industry needs to be painted with the same paintbrush. However, when you're looking at an industry where you have over 3,200 complaints, there's a problem. We need to address that problem. These steps are small measures to getting us there. Once we get into committee, maybe we can take that greater step in order to assist our seniors and assist our community members so that they don't have to hide in their houses with embarrassment because they've been taken advantage of, or they don't have to feel so vulnerable when it's time, when the bills are racked up, and they have that ultimate opportunity to pay into something where they're going to eliminate a lot of your debts, and then they find out that they're in a bigger hole than they were. I'm going to enjoy listening to the debate as we talk about this, because it will definitely benefit consumers.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Hon. James J. Bradley: Again, I think the address was a most appropriate address dealing with many of the challenges all of us face. I've heard from a couple of members now, on the opposite side: the member for Cornwall and the member for Manitoulin—I know the ridings have longer names than that. Both talk about committee and how important it is to get a good analysis at committee. The committee might decide to have people come in and make presentations or comments; they would certainly want to receive their written comments. They may want to look at it on a clause-by-clause basis, which normally happens. But to do so, we have to get these bills to committee.

I understand, when there's a very contentious bill where there's significant opposition, that a debate is going to be somewhat prolonged, and it may well be. I think, actually, if the House is working as it should, on

the very contentious bills that come before the House, there should be a full debate that takes place. Where there is a bill of this nature, where there appears to be a fairly good consensus on at least the principle of the bill, I think it's important to move this to committee at the earliest opportunity, having heard what some of the members have had to say. There's a feeling out there that governments in a minority Parliament should be more responsive to the opposition in particular, and the opposition should be more responsible than perhaps you have to be when there's a majority government. So I encourage members of the Legislature to permit this bill to go to committee for the kind of detailed analysis that it requires so that ultimately this bill, if the committee deems it appropriate, would come back either in its present form or in amended form for consideration at third reading.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member for Hamilton Mountain has two minutes.

Miss Monique Taylor: I'd like to thank the members from Thunder Bay–Atikokan, Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry, my colleague from Algoma–Manitoulin and the Minister of the Environment for their comments. This really is an interesting debate. It's important that we're talking about what consumers are facing in this province and legislation like this. I congratulate the minister of consumer affairs for bringing this forward. Yes, we think that it needs to be stronger, but like what was said previously, those are things that happen within the committee portion.

Part of what I didn't get to speak about was the fact that we need to ensure that consumers are educated, that there is literature, that there are radio ads, that there are different kinds of things through the media happening that allow consumers to see what's happening in the community that would maybe make them think twice about signing those kinds of contracts and making sure that those outlets are done in other languages so that everybody can understand what it is that we're talking about.

When I think about the pages in this House, I think, when they're in school, are they taught these kinds of things? So maybe put that into part of our education curriculum when we're learning about how to deal with our money and all of that—I believe that happens in grade 6, when we're looking at those kinds of things in school—that this is part of that discussion, making sure that consumers really know what they're signing before they sign a contract and making sure they read a contract before they sign it.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Further debate?

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: I'm pleased to rise to speak to Bill 55, An Act to amend the Collection Agencies Act, the Consumer Protection Act, 2002 and the Real Estate and Business Brokers Act, 2002 and to make consequential amendments to other Acts.

I think it's very important, as was mentioned by a number of speakers previously, that this is a bill that I think all parties in the House would support the principle

of. Who in this House would object to providing consumer protection as best we can, not only to our vulnerable seniors and others, but to everyone in the province? At the same time, I think it's very important that, when you're doing that, we do it in such a way that it will get—what should we say?—the best bang for the buck. We don't want to be like the door-to-door salesmen and sell this quickly because it sounds good today, but all of a sudden, tomorrow we find out it really wasn't to everyone's benefit or for the benefit of society in general.

So I just wanted to go through it. As I mentioned, in the title of the bill, it's quite clear that there are three main areas that are dealt with. Mr. Speaker, the best way to go through the act and what it does is to look at the schedules. In this case, there are three schedules. The first one is the Collection Agencies Act; the second one is of course the Consumer Protection Act, 2002; and the last one is the real estate brokers.

Now, on the first one, the Collection Agencies Act, I think it's important to recognize that, of course, that's to set standards for people who have money out owed to them, and then they hire people to collect that money. Mr. Speaker, it is all over the map as to how that's done.

To speak of an example, I want to say that I had the misfortune—I guess that's what you would call it—to be parked in a parking lot the other day, and I was there longer than I expected to be. When I got back, someone else had been to my car before I got there, and there was this little blue ticket on my window. I found it kind of interesting because it was not a municipal parking lot; it was a privately owned parking lot. So I looked at the little blue piece of paper as to what it was, and of course, it was a ticket. But the ticket in that type of parking lot does not have a place where you can object to the ticket or give an explanation or even suggest that maybe it was done improperly. It says on the ticket that, under the contract that I've agreed to when I parked there, they have the power to either tow it or give me a ticket, and that I have an obligation to pay the ticket or pay for the towing if they did that. It doesn't leave anything in between.

I have been looking for some time now to find this contract that they have with me, where I would have seen that prior to having entered into this contract with them. I guess we'd call it door-to-door—only it was my car door—sales that they put this on, and I find out that there isn't any place I can deal with that. So now I have a choice: It says I can send in my money, or they will turn it over to a collection agency to come and get it.

1000

I don't know exactly how it's going to work yet, because I'm waiting for the individual, but the individual, as far as I know, does not know who I am. So it may be a little bit more difficult for them than they had first envisioned. But this is a system where I have been entered into a contract with someone, having no knowledge of having entered into that.

I'm kind of having a bit of fun with this myself, Mr. Speaker, but there are a lot of people who get caught up

in that type of a contract, when people go door to door, who have no idea, at the end of it, when it's over and the salesman leaves, how it happened and how they got into this. So I think it's very important, as the bill does it, to mandate that all contracts be in writing so everyone can actually see the contract that they've entered into, not suppose that the seller knows what they're talking about, and also to set caps for doing the collection. Obviously, in almost all cases where a debtor hires someone to do the collection, the cost of that collection is on top of the money that they're collecting. That would have a cap on it.

Also, I think it's important to recognize the cooling-off period in these contracts, that in fact there is an opportunity to change one's mind. Having said that, putting deadlines on that cooling-off period—I think we need to look further and find ways to deal with that, because maybe it was a misunderstanding. I think it's unreasonable to accept that someone who is vulnerable at the door and got talked into a contract—the chances of them in the first 10 days realizing that they were taken advantage of are quite minimal, and I think we need to find a way to deal with that. I had many, many calls a number of years ago from people who had energy sales coming to the door. In fact, it wasn't until they got the first or second bill from the new supplier that they realized they had entered into a long-term deal with that contractor and there was no way out. I think that becomes very important.

The second thing is the water heater issue. We've heard a lot of talk about that. That is, of course, in the Consumer Protection Act. I too have a personal experience with that, having had a rental water heater for some 20 years and then deciding that I wanted a larger one. I did some research and found that I could purchase one for what I had paid for the rental one in about five years. One has to wonder whether that contract was a legitimate, good deal when I signed it. I know why I did it when I did it, and I'm sure that's the truth with a whole lot of people, but I think there needs to be a much better regime in place to make sure that everybody understands what it is they're paying for and what it is they're getting. I think it was mentioned by my colleague from Stormont-Dundas-East Glengarry—I think that's the right riding.

Interjection: South.

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: Having the 20-day cooling-off period, that you cannot have it installed for the first 20 days after you buy it when you have made a new deal and your water heater is not working: I think we need to be able to make an arrangement where I can have hot water as quickly as possible. One needs to make sure that there's an opening in there for that.

It's also important that the process of how you get out of the contract is clear. As I mentioned, I had a hot water heater rental. When I called the company up and said that I no longer wanted it, they asked me if it was disconnected yet. I said, "No, not yet, but it will be this afternoon."

They said, "Well, give us a call when you no longer need it."

"Well, that will be in about three hours."

"Well, could you call us back?"

So we unhooked it, we put the new one on that I had purchased, and then when I called them back, they said, "Have you got a way of disposing of it?" They had no intention of picking it up. They were just telling me that I had to unhook it so I wouldn't be using their hot water heater, which they were going to throw away anyway, without paying them for it. I think we need to have clearer guidelines for how we deal with those.

The other thing I just quickly want to wrap up with is the real estate broker's licence. I totally agree with the approach that the real estate companies must be open and accountable and transparent with offers that are being made and offers that you're bidding against. I think it's also important that if it's all open and transparent, they are able to set their prices based on a mutual agreement between the seller and the realtor. It makes great sense. Why should it be all based on a percentage of the sale price or based on a flat fee? Why could we not have that choice between how a buyer and seller are wishing to make a deal, providing it's all transparent and they're all following the same rules?

I think it's very important to make the issue about all following the same rules, Mr. Speaker, because I think there are challenges in the industry as to people not charging appropriately. But if everybody was doing it right, they would all be doing it the same way, and that's not happening. I think everyone wants regulations that give everyone the opportunity to do their business in the same manner.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I will turn it over to someone else. I see my time has almost expired; so much left to say and so little time to do it in. I will just sit down and ponder how I will get that done.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Mr. Michael Mantha: I'm happy to add my comments to the debate for the member from Oxford, who actually touched on something; he triggered a memory in my mind.

In our household—at least, in my household—there is one Premier. I love her to death, and I always listen to what she has to say. However, we do, on occasions, have to have committee discussions.

It was not too long ago, when we actually just relocated to Elliot Lake, where an aggressive person presented themselves at our door, trying to sell, and was successful in aggressively selling my wife into signing into a contract. We sat down, and I was quite fortunate to have that discussion with her two days before that 10-day period. I was very fortunate to get a hold—it's not an easy fix, to try and change or to get out of these contracts once you've put your name on the dotted line. It's not that easy. They find various ways of not getting hold of you, not returning your call. However, I was successful, because I'm somewhat of an aggressive person myself. When I've got my mind set on something and I want to

fix it, we go ahead and we do it. I was happy to say that I was successful in fixing this.

But it's the whole problem that happened at home, where my partner, my love of my life, felt frustrated because somebody came to her door and took advantage of a situation that we were in.

Now, that was my household. Imagine every other household that goes through this. Imagine that senior, where her son or her daughter comes up to her and tells her, "Mom, what are you doing?" That is something that impacts them for a very great period of time, and it's difficult for people to go through that.

I've spoken about this on three occasions this morning, but that is something that we really need to look at. It is so important that we really look at consumer protection for seniors and all of our communities.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Hon. Jeff Leal: I must say, I enjoyed the comments from the member from Oxford this morning. I think we clearly see a consensus building in this House on all sides on Bill 55 and to provide stronger consumer protection.

As I said previously, during the last two years I was a city councillor in Peterborough, it was nonstop, getting calls from seniors with these fast-talking operators coming to their front doors and really putting on a terrible amount of pressure to sign these contracts.

If I was providing some advice today, I would say to the people of Ontario, "Deal with your publicly owned municipal utility," because many of them do have water heater programs. They are municipally owned; they're publicly owned. They are doing their business in the best interests of their customers, and often they have very informative programs to help to make a thoughtful decision before you sign on the bottom line. That is with your municipally owned utilities.

1010

I share what the member from Oxford said. You enter these contracts. They give you 10 or 12 pieces of paper. Inevitably, if you want to cancel—they have a 1-800 number on the top. Try that 1-800 number, Mr. Speaker; I have, on behalf of constituents. The 1-800 person—they are in Timbuktu, somewhere around the world, and you're trying to explain to that person in another part of the world how you're trying to cancel a contract for somebody living in Woodstock or Elliot Lake or Thunder Bay or Cobourg, and it's virtually impossible, because they don't understand the situation—if in fact they even answer that 1-800 number, and that's a bit of a long shot to happen, for them to even do that.

There's a consensus building. This legislation will be good for consumers in Ontario. We've got to get it to committee and get it to help our citizens.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Mr. Jim McDonell: It's a pleasure to get up and rise to discuss, certainly, the informed comments from our member from Oxford.

There are many issues. I'm glad to hear the Minister of Rural Affairs talk about one of the problems we see with this bill, that there's no clear legislation around the cancellation of existing contracts. That's one thing that's lost in this bill and one of the major sources of complaints that I understand we're receiving. When somebody chooses to purchase a water heater, the procedure to get out of an old contract—which may be very old, and the equipment may be paid for—is very hard to do.

That's the other thing: There's nothing that talks about the remaining costs of the previous contract. These units, I understand, cost about \$800. You're paying for them in just a couple of years. I know there are installation costs. But when you go to get out of it, there's nothing that talks about what your remaining fees are and what's the length of the contract.

I think there needs to be, just like there was in the cellphone regulations that the CRTC put out yesterday—very comprehensive—some talk about that, so that you know, when you sign a contract, what you are owing the previous company, if anything.

Then, as he talked about, the 1-800 number: Does it work? Can you get out of the contract, or is it one of these things that we understand it takes three or four months to get out of?

Certainly, some things in the debt settlement—or the amendments that we need to look at—and we've been hearing from our groups as well, the other issue of the debt settlement: Again, we've talked about some of the cancelling services. They're actually receiving funds from the debtors themselves—or the loaners themselves—so we need to make sure that that's clear to the people. We don't think it's fair that the person who is having trouble, where there's great duress, is having to pay a commission and finding out afterwards it was being paid—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Thank you. The member from Parkdale—High Park.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: I'm also commenting, of course, on the member from Oxford's comments a little earlier.

I have to say, I mean, the bill does take a small step forward for consumer rights. It's always a good thing. You're looking at somebody, for example, who signed up to a lifetime membership in Vic Tanny's. Anybody remember Vic Tanny's here? You're old if you do. Vic Tanny's died a long time ago, but I'm still alive, and I don't get the use of that.

Yes, it's very important to read contracts. Yes, it's very important to have consumer protections. I would like to suggest to the government that there are two huge areas where consumers are far from being protected. One was addressed yesterday in the member from Welland's bill, which was talking about rent controls not being extended to anybody who lives in a building that was built after 1991. That's not consumer protection.

I'd also like to point out to the government about payday lenders. If you've ever borrowed money from a payday lender, you will know that it's actually legalized usury; that's what it is. Payday lenders charge over 500%

interest. We should move against that. Government moved very slightly; it still hasn't helped the vast majority of Ontarians. Payday lenders are illegal in Quebec; they should be illegal here. That's a huge area of consumer protection that this government hasn't looked at.

So, as far as it goes, yes, it's a good thing. Would I strengthen it? Yes, I'd strengthen it by passing two bills that have been tabled before this House. Payday lending: Make them illegal or at least force them to charge no more than 35% interest. They'd all go out of business at that. Rent control: Why do we have it for people who live in buildings that were built before 1991 and not after 1991? This isn't fair.

To the member from Oxford for his comments: Absolutely, if we could strengthen this bill to include those other two bills at committee, I would say, "Way to go." But unfortunately, we can't. As far as it goes, it's not bad, but let's go far, far farther.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Oxford has two minutes.

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: I want to thank the member from Algoma-Manitoulin, the Minister of Rural Affairs, and the members from Stormont-Dundas-South Glengarry and Parkdale-High Park for their kind comments.

I do want to speak to just a couple of points from their presentations. The cancellation fees: When you lease a car, they give you a paper and you sign on for how much you have to put up front to get the car, and then you get so much a month, and then if you want the residual at the end of the lease, there's a price on there, what it would cost you to do that; or if you walk away in between, it will calculate exactly how much you're supposed to pay for that. It would seem to me that this could be done for water heaters too, to set parameters of where you start from, where you're going and how you're getting there, and then what you do at the end of it.

I think with rentals, if there's a cost to get out, there should be a length of time after which you should be able to renegotiate at a lower price if the old heater is still running, because you've paid for it. So I think that needs to be addressed in order to have consumer protection.

The other thing I wonder about is why it is we have got in such—what shall we say?—a dilemma with hot water heaters when the furnace in the same house is part of the house and there are no lease agreements. I've never had a constituent call my office yet to talk about the lease agreement on the furnace and how they were having trouble with it. I wonder how we got into this with the water heater. I know in my case it was that originally, when the rental units started, you rented the unit with the power to run it for so much a month. Then when they disconnected the power directly to it and put it on the meter, they kept the rental going. One might want to have a look at that as to how that rental agreement should be structured.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Thank you. It being 10:15, this House stands recessed until 10:30 this morning.

The House recessed from 1017 to 1030.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mrs. Jane McKenna: I'd like to introduce, from Burlington, page Eric Orosz's mother, Heather Weaver-Orosz; his father, Michael Orosz; and his friend from school, his classmate Daniel Hoogsteen. The member from Niagara Falls will be introducing the grandparents.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: It's my pleasure to introduce Emily Wright, a co-op student from Ryerson. It's her last week in my office. Thank you, Emily.

Mr. Kim Craitor: I'm really pleased to introduce the grandparents of our page Eric, who is also the page captain. The grandparents, who have driven all the way from the beautiful city of Niagara Falls, are Joe and Marlene Orosz. Joe, welcome. I assured them that their grandson is doing an excellent job here at Queen's Park. In spite of the politicians, he's doing a great job.

Mr. John O'Toole: There's a very good friend of mine in the gallery: Bernie Condon, a former councillor in the Peterborough county area, as well as a former General Motors manager.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Mr. Speaker, I invite the entire assembly to join me in welcoming a volunteer in my campaign, from my office: Mehma Kaur.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I'd like to introduce the parents of my executive assistant, Kim Howson. Calvin and Karen Howson are here with us from Georgetown.

Ms. Laurie Scott: I'd like to introduce, from my constituency office, Bonnie Harrison, in the members' gallery; and with her is Erika Robson, my co-op student who is doing a fabulous job in the constituency office. We welcome them to Queen's Park. My executive assistant from the office just a few floors above, John Spink, is with them, too.

Ms. Catherine Fife: It's my pleasure to introduce Beth Gorbet and Wendy Gibson, from the Canadian Association of Natural Nutritional Practitioners. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: I've got a number of members of the Oakville Provincial Youth Advisory Committee here today. From Abbey Park High School, we've got Brayden Ross and Aish Abid; from St. Thomas Aquinas, we've got Maameyaa Brako, Chantelle Colangelo, Colm Human and Nathan Greene; from St. Mildred's-Lightbourn School, we've got Ankita Sharma and Firoza Dodhi; from Oakville Trafalgar, we have Alex Glista, a former page; and from my office, we've got Grace Johnson and Ellen Kuschnik. Please welcome them to Queen's Park.

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: I'd like to introduce Linda Zimmerman and Richard Lewis, who were the winning bidders for a day at Queen's Park, from an event put on by the Stratford Shriners' club. Welcome to the assembly.

Hon. Jeff Leal: The Premier introduced the parents of Kim Howson, Calvin and Karen, but I do have a con-

nection. Calvin and I grew up together in the south end of Peterborough, and we attended high school together, so we go back a long way. I'm really happy that they're with us today.

Hon. Ted McMeekin: I'd like to introduce a really good friend of mine from Waterdown. Irene Woods is here. Irene, welcome.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: I want to welcome Marguerite Marlin, a PhD student at McMaster University—but a resident of Ottawa Centre—who is visiting Queen's Park today. Welcome to Queen's Park.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): On behalf of the Minister of Finance, for Melanie Forbes: Her mother, Ana Rendeiro, and sister Kayla Forbes are visiting Melanie to watch the good job that she does. Welcome.

I'd also like to introduce, in the Speaker's gallery, former MPP Dave Neumann, from Brantford, in the 34th Parliament. Welcome.

He was also my high school grade 12 world politics teacher. I just thought I'd let you know that.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I actually passed his course. I just thought I'd let you know that. Okay.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): All at the same time: "Now we know," right?

MEMBERS' EXPENDITURES

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I beg to inform the House that I have laid upon the table individual members' expenditures for the fiscal year 2012-13. Members will find these copies in their desks.

It is now time for question period.

ORAL QUESTIONS

ACCESS TO INFORMATION

Mr. Rob Leone: My question is for the Premier. In the privacy commissioner's report released this morning, the truth about the culture of the Liberal Party of Ontario was finally revealed. Our suspicions have finally been confirmed. Government business is no longer the business of the people, and it hasn't been since that party has been in power. Crucial decisions about how public money will be spent are being made in secret, in the realm of private emails and BlackBerrys, only to be wiped from drives and computer memory, never to be seen again.

Premier, this is your party's MO. There is the public realm where we're told the government is operating; then there's the secret world, the world hidden from the opposition, the media and the public eye.

The report is only the tip of the iceberg, Premier. People are breaking the law. Let the people pass judgment on your party's record where billions are spent and no one is to blame. Will you call an election now, and let

the people finally pass judgment on your scandal-plagued government?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock. Be seated, please. Thank you.

Premier?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: First of all, I want to thank the member for the question, and I want to thank Dr.—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Leeds-Grenville will withdraw.

Mr. Steve Clark: Withdraw.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

Premier.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I want to thank Dr. Cavoukian for her report. We're examining her recommendations very closely.

But I want to be clear that from the moment that I have been in this office, we have been following all of the rules in terms of retention of documents. We have trained staff. We have made it clear what the expectations are, and we have taken additional steps to make sure that staff are aware of their responsibilities.

As I said, we've improved the orientation for new employees, and we have put in place mandatory training so that everyone knows exactly what the rules are. I would have it no other way, and we will continue in that vein, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Rob Leone: Back to the Premier: So badly did your government want to obfuscate the fact that they have been only acting in the interests of the Liberal Party that they have deleted countless emails. Now, apparently, Mr. Speaker, the files that existed on government computers have been transferred to USB memory sticks to avoid any scrutiny. The privacy commissioner found that your party's protocol was to transfer files off of computers and, "Once this transfer is complete, original records should then be erased in such a way that they cannot be recreated...." This protocol, Premier, is against the law.

For months, the Liberals have been saying they have acted in good faith, that they've been acting to protect the public interest. Sadly, a great deal of these records are irretrievably lost. Will you do what you can to salvage what little is left of your reputation and immediately provide us with any and all remaining documents on secret drives and secret USB keys?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Let me be clear: The practice in my office and in the office of my caucus and my cabinet—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I'm going to go right to the members' ridings. The member from Renfrew, come to order. The member from Prince Edward-Hastings, come to order.

Finish, please.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Our practice has been to follow the rules. We have done that from the moment we came into office.

I just want to read what the privacy commissioner said in her report: "Throughout this entire investigation, my office received the full cooperation of all parties involved, including the Premier's office, Cabinet Office, the MGS...."

We have been following the rules. We have made it very clear that the practices that will be in place, that have been in place since we came into this role, have been in full compliance with the rules, and we will continue in that manner.

1040

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary.

Mr. Rob Leone: This falls directly on this Premier and this government. In the report released earlier today, the commissioner speaks of an "inappropriate deletion of emails by the former Premier's staff as part of the transition to the new Premier." I quote again from the privacy commissioner: "It is difficult to escape that conclusion."

You hand-picked your staff, Premier. Your Dalton-McGuinty-era two-email-account staff have made a decision to delete emails to avoid incrimination and have blurred the line between government and Liberal partisan interests to the point where it doesn't exist. The privacy commissioner was clear: Your government broke the law, and the private Gmail accounts we uncovered last week further prove the point.

So we ask again, will you hand over the USB keys full of the information you tried to bury from Ontarians, or will this only end when the OPP break down the doors of the Premier's office and confiscate—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock. Be seated, please.

Premier?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Mr. Speaker, the tenor of the question notwithstanding, let me repeat that since February we have been committed to making changes to make sure that all staff in all of our offices are complying with the rules. We have provided 130,000 documents to the justice committee, 30,000 documents to the justice committee from my office. We will continue to comply with the requests, and we will continue to make sure that all of the rules are followed by my office and across government.

ACCESS TO INFORMATION

Mr. John Yakabuski: My question is also for the Premier. Commissioner Cavoukian has stated in her report that in early 2013, staff in the former Premier's office had approached the secretary of cabinet about how to permanently delete emails and other electronic documents such as attached briefing notes. We also found that members of your staff have been using private, non-

FOIable email accounts to communicate regarding government business. Premier, the buck stops with you. People in the former Premier's office, people who work for you, people who work in this government, are breaking the law. It is not good enough to say it won't happen again. Who will be facing criminal charges, and who will be resigning?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock. Be seated, please.

Premier?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I think I've addressed the issues around Dr. Cavoukian's report, and we will continue to work with the privacy commissioner. As I've said, we have taken extraordinary steps to make sure that all of our staff are following the rules.

Mr. Speaker, in terms of email, let me be very clear: Matters not related to government business should not be dealt with on government computers. Government business is obviously susceptible to and subject to freedom of information.

What I have said in public is that where private emails might be used is in examples like in a period of transition, when there were many volunteers who were working on their private emails; new employees who might not have had a government account; certain transitory records; certain legislative deliberations; and instances of political partisan activity that should not be using government accounts. But, Mr. Speaker, all of those rules will be followed.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. John Yakabuski: It's lovely for the Premier to quote the way it should work, but that's not the way it has worked with her government. People in the transition team from one Premier to another have broken the law. They used private emails to talk about government business. You've spoken so many hollow words about how you wanted this to be a transparent and open process, but your actions belie that promise.

You have done everything you can to prevent us from getting to the bottom of this scandal. We know that your words are completely disingenuous. Will you now admit—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): That's not parliamentary. Withdraw, please.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Withdraw.

A judicial inquiry, Premier, is the only thing that will get to the bottom of your scandal. Will you now simply admit that your thirst to cling to power has corrupted you beyond repair?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock. While I—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): While I'm asking for attention, I'm not getting it.

While I did not find that exactly unparliamentary, I'm going to ask all members, because of the heatedness of

this particular nature, to guard your words and race to the top. I'm just going to leave it at that.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): And I don't need the editorials after the Speaker makes a ruling.

Premier, please answer.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I just want to address the personal motivation that the member opposite seems to be attacking. My personal motivation for being in this place is to make sure that we deliver the services that are necessary to the lives of people in this province. I'm only here because I believe in publicly funded education, I believe in public health care, and I believe in making sure that government delivers the services that people need.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Order.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: That's why I'm here. I'm in the leadership because I believe that we have a lot of work to do in terms of continuing to deliver those services and continuing to strengthen them.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member for Nepean—Carleton will come to order.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I appreciate Dr. Cavoukian's report. We are working to make sure that every law is followed. Since February we have taken measures to make sure that those are in place.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary.

Mr. John Yakabuski: That's a lovely story, Premier, but you're the boss and the buck stops with you. You are responsible. Thirteen million Ontarians deserve better than this. The commissioner has made it very clear: You broke the law. Staff were taught how to break the law and then went on to break the law, all because your government is addicted to power. The stain of this scandal is on you and every member of your government.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock. Order.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I actually stood to ask the government to come to order, and now I end up having to ask you to come to order.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I'll wait.

Premier.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The team has got me excited.

Member, finish your question, please.

Mr. John Yakabuski: As I said, the stain is on you and every member of your government. The people of Ontario no longer have confidence in you. Even the third party must be reconsidering their decision to prop you up.

Will you simply admit you are no longer fit to govern this province as you have lied to the people of Ontario?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. I know the member is ready. Withdraw, please.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Withdraw.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Premier.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: The privacy commissioner, Dr. Cavoukian, has given us some recommendations on practices that need to be changed. When we came into office, when I took on this role, we put in place rules. We made it clear. We put training in place to make it clear what the rules were and to make sure that all staff followed those rules. We will continue in that manner.

I have done everything in my power since I came into this role to make sure that the information that was asked for was provided, to open up a process to make sure that the questions could be asked and information could be received. We will continue in that manner.

As I said, we are working with the privacy commissioner's office. She has appreciated how we have worked with her. We will continue to do that as we look at the recommendations, and I appreciate that she has made the recommendations.

ACCESS TO INFORMATION

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is to the Premier, and I think it's a pretty obvious one. Does the Premier agree that it was wrong and likely illegal for senior Liberal political staff to actually destroy information about the gas plants?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I've been very clear what the practice is in my office, and I have been clear from the day that we came into office that all of the rules will be followed and the—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): As I turned my head to look—stop the clock, please—I heard somebody say something unparliamentary, and I would offer the member an opportunity to withdraw, whoever that was. If not, I'll be watching.

Premier.

1050

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: So, Mr. Speaker, my—
Interjections.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I recognize the former member for Mississippi Mills.

Applause.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: So, Mr. Speaker, I've been—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I find it regrettable that some people have taken the moment to say things that they're not, by convention, supposed to say.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): And some people continue to talk while I'm trying to get attention.

Okay, wrap up, please.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Since February, we took steps to make sure that all political staff were aware of their responsibilities of what the rules were. That's why

we put training in place; that's why we've changed the practices in the office.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Ontario's Information and Privacy Commissioner said that destroying information "undermines" key legislation as well as "transparency and accountability...."

Will the Premier tell Ontarians what the government was trying to hide when senior Liberal political staff were destroying information?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: As I have said a number of times, we have provided all of the documents that we have been asked for. My office has provided 30,000 documents—130,000 documents across government.

We are working to make sure that all of the information that's being asked for is provided. We are following the rules in the office; we have put training in place. We will work with the privacy commissioner, as she has put forward some recommendations that we want to work on with her.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Ontario's Information and Privacy Commissioner said she has "trouble accepting that" deleting emails "was simply part of a benign attempt to efficiently manage one's email accounts." She's raising serious questions.

Does the Premier really believe that when the Minister of Energy's chief of staff, the former Premier's chief of staff, his principal secretary and his energy adviser were destroying all of these documents, they were simply trying to keep their inboxes clean?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: As I said, Dr. Cavoukian has raised some serious concerns. She has put recommendations forward. We have taken proactive steps, since we've been here in February, to make sure that all the rules are being followed and information is available and is retained, and all of those protocols are in place.

We will continue to work with the privacy commissioner, because I think the recommendations that she has put forward are very important, and they come out of legitimate concerns that she has raised. So we will continue to work with her.

ACCESS TO INFORMATION

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is for the Premier. When the Premier took control of the Liberal Party in January, the cancelled private power deals and the impending hearings were one of the key challenges that were facing her party. At the heart of that issue was whether documents were being hidden. Did the Premier ask any questions or raise any concerns at all—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Excuse me. Be seated, please. I'll hold the question. Stop the clock, please.

The member from Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound will withdraw.

Mr. Bill Walker: Withdraw.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

You put your question? Are you finished?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Did the Premier ask any questions or raise any concerns at all about emails being deleted in the Premier's office?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Government House leader.

Hon. John Milloy: Let me remind the leader of the third party of what happened in terms of the gas plant situation when the new Premier took over—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Newmarket-Aurora, come to order; the member from Halton, come to order; and the member from Durham, come to order.

Hon. John Milloy: It was this Premier who offered a special committee to the opposition, which they rejected, and when they decided to go after a former member of the House, she worked to have the committee's mandate broadened. It was this Premier who wrote to the Auditor General and asked him to look into the Oakville situation. It was this Premier who asked Liberal members of the committee to ask for a government-wide search for documents, which the opposition rejected. It has been under this Premier's watch that we have seen 130,000 documents go to the committee.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: People were asking questions about missing emails long before this Premier took control of the Liberal Party. There were serious questions about senior Liberal staff deleting emails and destroying information, and the Liberal leader knew, or should have known, what was happening when she took over.

When the Premier was sworn in, did she ask any questions at all about why this information had been destroyed, or was it simply a case of, "Don't ask, don't tell"?

Hon. John Milloy: There have been 130,000 documents that have been provided to the committee, including 30,000 from the Premier's office.

In terms of the practices that are cited by the IPC in her report, the Premier has addressed that. She has talked about the measures this government has taken to make sure that we have tighter controls. She has also outlined—and I can inform the House that in my capacity as Minister of Government Services, I have asked this morning for a meeting with the IPC so that I can sit down with her and we can work together to make sure that we can strengthen our safeguards to make sure that this situation does not happen again and that rules and regulations are followed.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: The commissioner reports that it is difficult to escape the conclusion that records were destroyed during the transition phase. Yet, as new leader of the Liberal Party, the Premier didn't ask any questions or raise any issues. Why didn't the Premier ask the basic questions that anyone who is genuinely concerned about missing documents would have asked?

Hon. John Milloy: We have a committee of the Legislature, which has been constituted to be called at the call of the Chair, meaning that it is up to the members themselves—of which they have a majority—on when it can meet. They can summon any witnesses they want. My understanding is, 33-plus witnesses have come forward, including the present Premier, the Minister of Energy and former Ministers of Energy. They have also been provided with 130,000 documents, including 30,000 from the Premier's office.

The current Premier has gone to great lengths to be as open and transparent as possible on this issue. Again, we have charged a committee of this Legislature, which is completely unfettered, and allowed them to look into any aspect of this situation.

GOVERNMENT SPENDING

Mr. Peter Shurman: My question is to the Minister of Finance. Minister, I've been surprised with your reaction to the release of a list of proposals on how to further pick the pockets of Ontarians to raise the money you need to balance your budget.

Here you are, a former bank executive, facing me, a former corporate executive. We're had to ask our subordinates to cut costs. They'd complain but they'd do it: 10%, really difficult; 5%, tough but not impossible; 2% or 3% was a walk in the park.

Here we are talking about moving towards balance, and make no mistake, Minister: Talking about it is mostly what you people do. We discovered that you have a nickel-and-dime list aimed at grabbing more and pulling it out of the economy.

We have offered to assist with a select committee, but you were dismissive of wanting to find savings. If you had a list of new revenue tools, there should be a companion list asking ministries where they could cut costs, like we both had to do in our private sector lives. Is there such a memorandum, Minister?

Hon. Charles Sousa: Thank you for the question. It gives me the opportunity to reaffirm the outstanding work that we are doing in controlling our spending, being disciplined and determined. That's why our spending growth is less than 1% year over year. It's why we've exceeded our targets for four years running by \$21 billion. Last year alone, it was a \$5-billion reduction in our deficit. We'll continue to do that.

Of course we've reviewed and we've assessed all of the fees that are applicable to government, and we've rejected many of them that the member opposite makes reference to. We will continue to do our job. We look forward to the members opposite to support our budget as well.

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The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Peter Shurman: I'm beginning to get the idea that we in Ontario have seen Tweedledum and Tweedledee replaced by Frick and Frack. I'm beginning to think you haven't got any bright ideas on how to move this

province toward balance, maybe no ideas at all except grabbing all you can or settling with unions like OPSEU, only to have their leader laugh at you. I'm beginning to think you'd better fess up.

You may not like my party's plan, but we're the only party in this House that has advanced any plan at all. The third party wants whatever it wants, and you just give it to them. How is that constructive? And you wonder why we are not willing participants in your budget process. The answer is, because we don't want to be your accomplices.

Minister, Ontarians want to know how much more you're going to make them pay for your government's spending habits. Because of you, Ontario is now the seventh-highest borrower in the world that isn't actually a country.

Are you or aren't you capable of balancing the budget by reducing costs? If not, will you—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

Minister of Finance?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock, please. Be seated, please.

Before I start the clock, I'm getting a little anxious with some of the armchair quarterbacks who continually ask me to do somebody else's job. I will do my job. What's frustrating is that for those individuals who try to watch the clock for me and tell me how to do that, my record is about two seconds off in question period, and I check every day.

For those who claim that people are getting way too much time: Knock it off. For those who have decided that they know how to do it better here: Knock it off.

Minister of Finance.

Hon. Charles Sousa: Mr. Speaker, the member opposite just referenced his plan. His plan doesn't add up. It's fraught with mistakes. Even the mathematics of his plan are incorrect, and we've stated that and we've shown it to them. Now they have the audacity to suggest that they have a better plan.

I can assure the member opposite that during my discussions and deliberations with bondholders and rating agencies, they are very satisfied with what it is that we are doing. Ontario is being well received because of the strong economic fundamentals that we have, because of the plan that we have to balance, and the methodic way in which we're doing it.

The member opposite should know Ontario is the only province that has not only met those targets on an ongoing basis, but we've exceeded them when the others have not. We'll continue on this path of being disciplined in our spending, and we're going to do everything possible to increase our—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. New question.

ACCESS TO INFORMATION

Mr. Peter Tabuns: To the Premier: Long before the Premier was sworn in as Liberal leader, I raised serious

questions about emails that seemed to be missing from the Premier's office. When the Premier became Liberal leader, did she raise any questions about what was missing and why?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I want to address this question, and it speaks to the issue that was raised by the leader as well.

I have said repeatedly, Mr. Speaker, that as soon as I came into this office, we put in place protocols. I made sure that staff understood what the rules were. I did ask questions about what protocols were being followed, which is why there's extra training that has been done. When new staff come in, they know what the rules are. We are following the rules.

We have turned over information, 30,000 documents from our office, and that has been all part of our commitment—my commitment, my personal commitment—to open up the process, to make sure that all of the information that was being asked for was received by the people who were asking for it.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Premier, you still haven't answered that question. You've talked about what your office has done, but when you came to office, you didn't investigate the destruction of emails, the absence of information, the inability to respond to a freedom of information request. Documents were destroyed and you didn't seem to care. Why didn't you ask the basic questions that anyone concerned about the facts would have asked?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I asked the questions about what our practice was going to be and how we were going to conduct our office and how we were going to open up the process. The government House leader has outlined what we did in terms of asking that there be a select committee put in place—which was rejected by the opposition—opening up the mandate of the justice committee, making sure that there was a forum for all the questions to be asked and answered.

We have worked with the privacy commissioner; we will continue to work with her. We have asked the Auditor General to look at both situations; he has, and is doing that. We are doing everything in our power to comply with the rules, to make sure that information is provided and to make sure that this is an open and transparent process going forward.

RENEWABLE ENERGY

Mr. Phil McNeely: Mr. Speaker, my question, through you, is for the Minister of Energy. Minister, Ontario is a leader in clean energy. Thanks to our government's investment, we've created 31,000 jobs and a resilient renewable energy sector across the province. I know that we've also been listening to municipalities to hear their ideas to improve how we site renewable energy projects and how we can better engage local communities from the beginning.

Speaker, through you to the Minister of Energy: Could the minister please update the House on the steps our

government is taking to improve the siting and procurement of renewable energy projects across Ontario?

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: I thank the member for the question. Our government is solidly committed to investing in renewable energy. It creates good jobs, eliminates dirty coal-fired generation and cleans up our air. We have listened to communities and mayors.

For large renewable projects, the Ontario Power Authority is creating a new bidding process where priority approval is given to projects that have prior municipal approval, making it extremely difficult for contracts to be awarded without an arrangement with the municipality. The new rules also empower and give to municipalities and other public entities extra power to engage as owners and partners in projects moving forward.

We are providing funding to small and medium-sized municipalities to create municipal energy plans, and we're increasing property taxes on wind turbines to provide revenue to municipalities. Mr. Speaker—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Phil McNeely: Thank you to the Minister of Energy for that update. I know my constituents will be pleased to hear that our government remains committed to investing in clean, renewable energy. Our investments have helped build enough clean energy to power 900,000 homes.

As we move forward, these changes will help strengthen our green energy economy by bringing stability and predictability to the system. Providing communities with increased local control over the planning and siting of renewable energy projects is a responsible thing to do. It will not only ensure that communities have a voice, but it will make sure that all areas benefit from continued development.

Speaker, I know that there have been specific concerns in many of Ontario's rural areas regarding renewable energy. Could the minister please update this House on what our government is doing to address the concerns of Ontario?

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: Minister of Rural Affairs.

Hon. Jeff Leal: Thank you to the member from Ottawa-Orléans for the question. Our government has proposed new rules for siting renewable energy projects that respect rural communities and give them a stronger voice. We have struck the right balance to provide what residents deserve, what municipalities want and what the industry needs to grow and to create jobs.

But don't take my word for it. Here's what some of our fine rural mayors are saying: "It's good news for municipalities," says Kingsville mayor Nelson Santos. "Absolutely, it's a step forward," says Leamington mayor John Paterson.

I will continue to work with rural communities across Ontario and my colleagues here at Queen's Park to identify opportunities to further strengthen rural Ontario, because when rural Ontario succeeds, all Ontario is stronger.

IMMIGRATION POLICY

Mrs. Christine Elliott: My question is to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration. Minister, Ontario already has the highest processing fees in all of Canada for employers who want to hire skilled immigrants through the Provincial Nominee Program, yet according to your treasury board document, you want to increase these fees by yet another \$500.

Minister, will you ensure that Ontario businesses, many of which are already facing significant obstacles to growth, will not be faced with another \$500 fee hike?

Hon. Michael Coteau: I'd like to thank the member for the question. As the member knows, immigration is a shared responsibility between the provincial government and the federal government, and the temporary foreign worker agreement is an agreement between the federal government and provincial government.

To date, we've only had 30 people last year who have gone through the temporary foreign worker application process here in our province, through our government. We have this mechanism there to allow for organizations that work with agriculture, that work to fill specific needs, to fill in those gaps that are necessary to make sure that Ontario is successful.

1110

This is a proposal that is currently in process. It hasn't been approved, and it's something we're exploring, but we need to make sure that at the end of the day Ontario is set up for success, and temporary foreign workers, through the PNP program, is a mechanism we'll use.

Mrs. Christine Elliott: As the minister will know, the fees associated with the PNP program are entirely provincial. Let's go over some of the fees applicable in other jurisdictions. Currently, in order to process a skilled worker in BC, they charge \$550; New Brunswick, \$250; Newfoundland, \$150; Prince Edward Island, \$150. Alberta, who are also facing skilled labour charges but through the PNP have seen their immigration rate double, does not charge a fee for this service. But what does Ontario do? Charges \$2,000 already.

Minister, how can you possibly expect Ontario's businesses to compete with the rest of Canada when your government's current processing fee is about four times higher than its nearest competitor? What are you going to do?

Hon. Michael Coteau: We want to make sure that Ontario is set up for success. If we compare our PNP program to other provinces—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Halton, come to order. Thank you.

Answer, please.

Hon. Michael Coteau: If we compare our PNP program in Ontario to other provinces, we know that Alberta and Manitoba have 5,000 each, and in Ontario we're at 1,300. We need to make sure that we get to that 5,000 mark so we can attract the best and brightest people here to our province so we can continue to be successful.

This is a proposal that we want to move forward on. It's something that we believe is right for the province. I just want to remind the member opposite that this is a cost recovery program; 98% of the actual cost of this proposal is cost recovery.

COMMUNITY HEALTH SERVICES

Ms. Sarah Campbell: To the Minister of Infrastructure: Last week, I asked the Minister of Infrastructure about his department's decision to more than double the rent paid by the Mary Berglund Community Health Centre in Ignace. In response, he stated that they're paying \$5 a square foot for basic rent. He neglected to point out that his figure fails to include the compulsory O&M fees, realty tax and management fees and all of the repair costs, which brings their triple net lease to \$228,022.63, and translates to \$23.77 per square foot, but the minister should know this because he has access to the same information.

My question is simple: Is the minister prepared to make this situation right instead of continuing to deny the facts?

Hon. Glen R. Murray: I don't think we disagree. The base rent is \$5; it was \$3.50. Every other health centre, the ones in my constituency, pay base rents much higher than \$5—\$12, \$20, \$25, plus they have to pay on top of that.

I have said many times to the member that we are trying to work with them, and there has been significant communication between my office and Mary Berglund to try and sort through how we can do that. Obviously \$3.50, which was the base rent—before it was raised; it was raised to \$5—is a relatively modest rent.

I appreciate the challenges that the health centre is facing. We are working with the Ministry of Health right now—who have correspondingly increased their grants to do that—to try and figure out a way, either by looking at the amount of space or the storage space, to find a solution to it. But they are not paying inordinately high rents compared to other health centres.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Sarah Campbell: Mary Berglund CHC has been trying to resolve this issue for three years. Whenever the issue is raised in question period or through letters to ministry officials, the response from the government is never grounded in accurate information or correct figures. This rent is so unaffordable that already they've been forced to lay off staff, and the executive director has voluntarily given herself a pay cut to help pay the bills.

The executive director is so desperate to resolve the situation and protect the viability of her CHC that she has travelled to Queen's Park today, and she's sitting with a board member in the gallery. Will the Minister of Infrastructure and the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care meet with the executive director today, after question period, to finally resolve this issue?

Hon. Glen R. Murray: The short answer is yes, of course, and I had committed to the member from Ken-

ora—Rainy River that as soon as this House rises, I would come to her constituency to meet if it wasn't solved by that time. I will maintain that commitment: If we cannot resolve it before the House rises, I will come up and view the situation personally.

I would also be interested in the details of the funding formula, because the LHIN funds increases to health centres. If there is a gap there or there's information that we may be missing, I would be quite happy to be so informed.

The challenge is—and this is a challenge across government; I want to say this so all members understand—historically, over the last many decades, we were charging different rents, so there were hidden subsidies. The idea now is to get to full cost recovery so that everything is fair and transparent. If in that process there have been problems, we'll correct them.

WATER QUALITY

Ms. Soo Wong: My question is for the Minister of the Environment.

This week is Canadian Environment Week, which is an opportunity for people across Canada to celebrate our natural environment. The theme this year is Water—Working Together, and it's a fitting tribute to 2013 being designated as the International Year of Water Co-operation.

Considering our province borders on four Great Lakes and is home to more than a quarter of a million lakes, rivers and streams, working together to restore and protect our water is critical to maintaining our natural wealth.

Speaker, through you to the minister: Can he please tell the House how the government is helping people in their communities, working together, to protect their local water sources?

Hon. James J. Bradley: Thank you for the question, and I'm pleased to acknowledge in the gallery a former environment minister, Norm Sterling, who is with us today.

This year's theme for Canadian Environment Week provides an excellent opportunity for people to reflect on the excellent work we've achieved together protecting such a valuable resource called water.

Our government is helping people come together through their communities and local organizations to play a role in protecting their local source of water. Our Great Lakes Guardian Community Fund supports local, co-operative activities that aim to restore and safeguard areas across the Great Lakes and the St. Lawrence River basin; the Lake Partner Program is a volunteer-based water quality monitoring program which helps us monitor more than 600 inland lakes; and the Showcasing Water Innovation program fosters innovation by funding partners across the province who are finding innovative and cost-effective solutions for managing drinking water, waste water and stormwater systems. This is people working together for the environment.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Soo Wong: I'd like to thank the minister for providing the House with details about the various great programs and invaluable volunteer efforts people have undertaken across the province, co-operating and working together to protect our water.

I'm also pleased to see our government taking continued action to foster community co-operation and facilitate the type of collaboration that is required to restore our fresh water back to environmental health.

Speaker, through you to the minister: Can he please elaborate on future initiatives our government will be undertaking to support local efforts to protect Ontario's fresh water sources?

Hon. James J. Bradley: Yes. Again, I'd like to thank the member for the question.

The 2013 Ontario budget is building upon the successful leadership role that communities have taken in protecting local drinking water sources across Ontario. The budget, if passed, will provide \$13.5 million to protect the quality and quantity of drinking water sources for the people of Ontario, working in partnership with small and rural municipalities.

We have to remember where this all started: Walkerton. We can draw a straight line from the Walkerton tragedy to Justice O'Connor's recommendation to the work of the source protection committees. Our government has already invested \$200 million in the local development of source water protection plans, and we look forward with anticipation to continuing to support our small and rural municipalities, with the support of my opposition colleagues in passing the budget.

ACCESS TO INFORMATION

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: My question is to the Premier. All throughout this gas plant scandal, you have maintained that this is a problem—

Interjections.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: You're going to want to hear this—you have maintained that this is all Dalton McGuinty's fault. Your House leader today issued a statement saying that since February you've put new rules in place. Our party has emails from Monique Smith, the Premier's head of transition, a senior adviser in the Premier's office and a former MPP of this assembly. In this email, she's discussing government business about privileged gas plant documents and questioning the Speaker's ruling into the contempt of Parliament. I'll provide those to you, Speaker.

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Do you know the date of those emails, Speaker? From Monique Smith on March 6, 2013. The Premier's most senior transition adviser is now clearly implicated in the gas plant scandal. Will you fire Monique Smith today and will you call the OPP in to investigate?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: The member opposite has that email. The member opposite has that information. As I have said, we have done everything in our power to answer the questions and provide the information that has been asked for.

There are instances when private email needs to be used in partisan situations, in situations where it's non-government. There were instances in transition where private email was used by volunteers, by people who were part of the transition. We are working very hard to make sure that all the information is provided; witness the fact that the member opposite has the information that she was looking for.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Therein lies the problem. Yesterday her Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs said that the Liberal campaign team and the government were the same thing. That's a type of arrogance and hypocrisy that is astounding to the people whom I represent.

I have another email and it is from the Premier herself, this one on February 10, 2013. It's from Monique Smith, who was using her Premier's office email account, which meant that if she had one on February 10, 2013, she certainly had one on March 6, when she was conducting her government business on her Gmail account. What's curious about Monique Smith's February 10, 2013, email is that this one is sent to kathleenowynne@gmail.com. Premier, that's your email—your personal email—used in this gas plant cover-up. Can you tell me what other government business you're doing on your private Gmail account in order to skirt privacy laws in this—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please.

Premier.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: As I have said, the member opposite has that information. The member opposite has the email and has the contents of the email. What I will do and have done is make sure that when there are questions, where there is relevant information, we provide that information and we provide the answers, which is why the member opposite has the email in question.

LONG-TERM CARE

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is for the Minister of Health. Families with loved ones in long-term-care homes expect these homes to be safe. Yesterday the minister said that all of these homes receive annual inspections, but she neglected to mention that these are related to complaints and critical incidents.

In communities like Windsor, 90% of long-term-care homes have never received a full inspection as required by this government's own rules. Will the minister commit to providing the full resident quality inspections for every home so that families don't have to wait for a tragic incident to occur before seeing an inspector in their long-term-care home?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Yes, let me be very clear: There are three different kinds of inspections. There are the critical-incident and complaint-related inspections, and last year there were 2,347 of those inspections. There are also the RQI, the more thorough, intensive inspections. In addition, there are inspections that are done in

homes where there have been no complaints received in that year. There is an inspector in every home, every year.

I look forward to the supplementary because I think we've been over these numbers a few times. I do want to talk about some of the other excellent work that is happening in long-term-care homes to improve the quality of care.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Families have placed their trust in this government to do their job and make sure that long-term-care homes for seniors are inspected annually. When 90% of long-term-care homes in Windsor-Essex have never had a full inspection, it's clear that this government is failing at its job to protect seniors.

The government has already missed their first deadline of December 31, 2011. Will the minister provide a new timeline of when every long-term-care home in Windsor and in Ontario will actually receive a proactive, thorough inspection?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: As I've said, I have asked ministry officials to come forward with some options on how to strengthen inspections in long-term-care homes.

But let's talk about some of the other things that are happening. I am particularly proud of Behavioural Supports Ontario, and you've heard me talk about that, but I thought it might be interesting to hear specifically.

There's now a mobile outreach team in the Waterloo Wellington LHIN. They're following 818 residents in long-term-care homes who have behavioural challenges. Since they have become active, they've seen an 81% reduction in observed behaviours recorded for those particular patients—an 81% reduction. In addition, there has been a 63% reduction in transfers to hospital for people with mental health challenges.

Speaker, this is a remarkable success that is coming from specific investments to provide better care for people with behavioural challenges, most often dementia.

COMMUNITY SERVICE

Mr. Joe Dickson: My question is for the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration. My riding of Ajax-Pickering is home to many constituents who take time out of their busy schedules to volunteer their knowledge, time and service for the betterment of our community. Ontario can even boast of a slightly higher volunteer rate than Canada as a whole.

At an individual level, volunteer engagement enriches, empowers and builds a sense of belonging to my community. At the community level, volunteer engagement promotes inclusion and unity.

Mr. Speaker, through you to the minister: How is the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration recognizing these tremendous individuals and organizations?

Hon. Michael Coteau: I'd like to thank the honourable member for his question. Each year, Ontario benefits from the work of more than six million volunteers. These volunteers collectively contribute more than 860 million

hours annually. Our province has a long and proud tradition of volunteerism.

This spring, I was privileged to attend the June Callwood Outstanding Achievement Awards for Voluntarism. Throughout her life, the late Ms. Callwood was a tireless champion for the most vulnerable people in our society. She was a fearless activist, advocate and writer whose immeasurable accomplishments strengthened the social fabric of every community that she touched. Through her passion to serve the most disadvantaged people in our province, she helped convince others to take care of one another. As such, she has forged a long-lasting legacy here in Ontario. Named in her honour, this award recognizes individuals who donate their knowledge, their energy, their spirit and, most importantly, their time to make their communities a better place to live.

Mr. Speaker, these volunteers remind me of what it means to be a great citizen here in our great province. I was honoured to present this award—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Joe Dickson: Thank you, Minister. It was great to hear one of the examples of our government recognizing Ontario's outstanding volunteers.

While it is important to celebrate the hard work of these volunteers, it is also important to engage the not-for-profit sector, where many of our volunteers leave their mark. Not-for-profit organizations deliver many vital government services, promote social inclusion and help build economically and socially vibrant communities, including my community of Ajax-Pickering. Excluding hospitals, universities and colleges, the impact of the not-for-profit sector on the economy is close to \$29 billion in combined revenue annually.

Mr. Speaker, through you to the minister: What is our government doing to support the not-for-profit sector?

Hon. Michael Coteau: I'd like to thank the member for bringing to light the importance of Ontario's not-for-profit sector. As the minister responsible for this sector, I'm proud of the 46,000 organizations serving every region and demographic in our province. The not-for-profit sector creates jobs and helps attract new investments to Ontario communities by providing strong recreational, cultural and social infrastructure.

The government and the not-for-profit sector share similar goals. That's why we launched the Partnership Project two years ago to better understand what we could do to support the not-for-profit organizations and strengthen our relationship with that sector.

To this end, we've developed a number of initiatives. For example, through our Partnership Grant Program, we're investing \$7.3 million over three years to help 27 organizations find ways to operate more efficiently, extend their reach and promote volunteerism.

This government will continue to recognize the valuable contributions of thousands of organizations that make up the Ontario not-for-profit sector and will strengthen our relationship—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. New question.

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WASTE DIVERSION

Mr. Michael Harris: My question is to the Premier. Premier, in April you joined a long list of senior Liberals who have gone out on a limb to defend the eco tax scheme cooked up by your government five years ago. Despite the PC Party's repeated calls for these needless taxes to be scrapped, you told Ontarians that eco taxes were "just the cost of dealing with waste."

Premier, your position is unacceptable. Consumers shouldn't be billed \$200 million a year to fund Liberal recycling cartels. Now that you're forcing the environment minister to table a recycling bill tomorrow to make up for five years of Liberal failure on the environment, can you assure Ontarians that your government will meet the PC Party's demand to scrap eco taxes, which were created by the godfather of this tax scheme, Dalton McGuinty?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of the Environment.

Hon. James J. Bradley: One almost doesn't know how to answer that particular question, other than to say that if there were a paternity suit that would be launched on this issue, it would go to the Progressive Conservative Party, who brought in the bill, in the year 2002, which has caused so many problems, which allowed the establishment of what we would describe as cartels.

I cannot believe that you can be asking a question of this kind, when the real godfather of eco fees is your leader, the member for Niagara West-Glanbrook, who, when he was minister of consumer and commercial relations, as I think it was called then—and criticized very severely, by the way, by the former member for Owen Sound—did nothing about eco fees or the possibility of preventing them.

Our government is the government that's going to tackle this issue and ensure that it is simply a cost of doing business and not an additional fee.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Michael Harris: It's quite humorous to hear the environment minister blame a 10-year-old piece of legislation, when Ontario's current problems all stem from the decisions made by your government.

We all know that Liberal regulations cooked up by Ontario's godfather of eco taxes, the former Premier, force consumers to pick up the tab for recycling tires, electronics, paint cans and batteries, after being surprised by these additional charges at the cash register. It is this system that has created the mess that we're in today.

Premier, when the environment minister tables his recycling bill tomorrow, can we expect to see a commitment to undo five years of Liberal damage that has cost Ontario consumers hundreds of millions of dollars and left the province's recycling rate parked at just 23%?

Hon. James J. Bradley: I have consulted widely with a number of groups, organizations and individuals on

legislation that could be brought forward in the House at a future date—bringing forward a new bill to replace the flawed bill that was passed by the Conservative government when it was in majority. Almost to a person, they have indicated that the real problem that exists is the original bill—and all of the problems that have arisen from that. They have made recommendations to me. I happen to believe, for instance, the Ontario Waste Management Association and others have some great ideas that I want to see incorporated in any legislation that might be introduced in this House.

The last thing I want to say is, I wonder if the former Minister of the Environment's scars on his back have healed.

CANCER TREATMENT

M^{me} France Gélinas: Ma question est pour la ministre de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée.

Yesterday, the committee heard from Baxter, the company that mixed intravenous cancer drugs for Ontario hospitals for 27 years, prior to Marchese being awarded the contract that led to the diluted chemo drug tragedy. Baxter told us that it would have been impossible for them to prepare those chemotherapy drugs at Marchese's bidding price.

My question is simple: Is the minister certain that the lower price wasn't the main deciding factor for Medbuy when they awarded the contract to Marchese?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I'm very pleased to see that the committee is doing a very thorough job when it comes to investigating this situation.

I think it's important that we let Dr. Jake Thiessen do his work. He is doing a review of the cancer drug safety system in Ontario. He will be coming forward with recommendations.

We have moved forward on some initiatives to improve oversight. But I do think it's very important that we let Jake Thiessen do his report, that we let the committee do their work and that we review the entire knowledge that is gained through this process.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

M^{me} France Gélinas: The committee is doing their work, and it is becoming more and more obvious that what the committee has been told about price being a minor factor in the decision-making is actually not the case. After weeks of hearings, it is clear that the contract was awarded without any certainty of process, communication, or clarity, for that matter.

What we do know is that Medbuy needs to find savings to justify its existence. That's why they exist. Marchese's price was less, and this seems to have carried the most weight in the decision that was made.

Will the minister admit that her system of outsourcing and privatization is in desperate need of stronger guidelines and protections, and is she prepared to take this responsibility seriously and provide comprehensive oversight of that sector?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Speaker, unfortunately the member opposite has already determined the outcome of this work, and that is unfortunate, because others have testified. Let me quote Sandy Jansen, who is the director of pharmacy services at London Health Sciences Centre. She said, "Outsourcing these two agents was not in any way an effort to save money. It was absolutely around efficiency and around safety and volumes." That is one quote.

Christine Donaldson, director of pharmacy at Windsor Regional Hospital, testified, "In that case, really, cost didn't come into it as a factor. It was more safety and risk that had actually motivated us to choose this product from Marchese or" from any other "outside buyer."

Speaker, we have heard various testimony at committee. I think it's important that people understand that this is being taken very seriously. We have acted and we will continue to act, if so recommended.

SERVICES FOR THE DEVELOPMENTALLY DISABLED

Mr. Bill Mauro: Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Community and Social Services. In my riding of Thunder Bay—Atikokan, both my constituency offices, actually—the one in Thunder Bay and the one in Atikokan—prove to me to be the best vehicle through which I get information relative to the concerns of the people in my communities and the constituents I represent. I'd say it's probably the case for most of the members here.

One of the issues that I have consistently heard about from my constituents in Thunder Bay—Atikokan is in regard to the supports and the programming, the services and the financial investments that we made when it comes to people with developmental disabilities and their families. Minister, I'm just wondering if you can recount to the Legislature what we've done since being elected in 2003.

Hon. Ted McMeekin: I appreciate the member's question, and given it's clearly coming from a place of caring, I will respond as best I can. Our government remains strongly committed to assisting folk in this sector. Last year, our government invested some \$1.7 billion on developmental services, an increase of over half a billion dollars since 2003. It's important to note that 98% of that funding goes directly to services.

The answer to the member's question: Our 2013 budget proposes to add 42.5 million additional dollars a year for developmental services, and we estimate that this will help some 1,104 families with various supports. With this new investment, our government will have invested \$620 million more; that's a 63% increase since 2003. We've got some tough work ahead, but we're committed to getting the job done.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Bill Mauro: I want to thank the minister for that response. I know that my constituents and most of the constituents across the province will be very proud of what we've managed to do when it comes to that sector.

I will say, though, however, that the \$42 million, of course, that you've just mentioned as being included in this year's budget is going to require the passing of the budget for that \$42 million to flow. I know my constituents are very interested and hopeful that both of the opposition parties will find the capacity to, first, read the budget and, second, support the budget.

Speaker, through you to the minister: once again, can you define for me, please, what that \$42 million—should we get the budget passed—will be used for to support people with developmental disabilities not only in my riding of Thunder Bay—Atikokan but right across the province?

Hon. Ted McMeekin: Mr. Speaker, those investment dollars will support a wide range of supports that are needed. Like the member, I'm obviously hopeful that the budget will pass. We hear a lot of concern about this sector from all parties in this House, and we do need to move ahead with this; the quickest way to do that is through the budget.

I just want to emphasize that this is new money. It's money that's badly needed. There's much more to be done, of course, and we'll continue to work with Ontario's developmental services sector, families and others to make sure that we have a more fair and sustainable system.

REPORT, ENVIRONMENTAL COMMISSIONER OF ONTARIO

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I beg to inform the House that I have today laid upon the table an annual greenhouse gas progress report from the Environmental Commissioner of Ontario.

VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Nepean—Carleton on a point of order.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: I know the time for introductions has passed, but one of my close friends, one of my mentors and one of our former members of this assembly, and a cabinet minister, Norm Sterling, was here earlier, and I just wanted to acknowledge him.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Mr. Sterling was recognized in the House, but I appreciate your point of order.

The Minister of Consumer Services on a point of order.

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: Speaker, if you'd indulge me, I'm so happy to have my sister here today: Jill MacCharles-Crain, from Ajax, who's seen me through thick and thin. I'm just thrilled to have an important family member here with me today.

CORRECTION OF RECORD

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Cambridge on a point of order.

Mr. Rob Leone: I would like to correct my record. In my question today, I implied that the Premier released

the documents. I would like the record to be corrected to say that the PCs and the NDP ordered the documents released, and the Liberals should be ashamed to comply.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Before I do that, I'm going to remind all members that there is an opportunity—and it is a point of order—to correct your record, but any other editorial is to be vacated from that correction of the record.

VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Kenora—Rainy River on a point of order.

Ms. Sarah Campbell: I just wanted to formally welcome to the Legislature Gloria Pronger, who's the executive director of the Mary Berglund Community Health Centre, and also her board member Chicki Pesola. Welcome.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from London—Fanshawe on a point of order.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: I would like to formally welcome, as well, to the Legislature Linda Zimmerman and Richard Lewis from London. They're here today visiting the Legislature, and I hope they have a great time.

DEFERRED VOTES

ORDER OF BUSINESS

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): We have a deferred vote on Mr. Hillier's amendment to Mr. Wilson's amendment to the motion to apply a timetable to certain business of the House.

Call in the members. This will be a five-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1143 to 1148.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Mr. Hillier has moved that Mr. Wilson's amendment to the motion to apply a timetable to certain business of the House be amended by adding the following:

"That, in the event of prorogation before the want of confidence motion standing in the name of the member from Simcoe—Grey is called, the motion shall be placed on the Orders and Notices paper on the second day of the subsequent session and shall be called on the fifth sessional day of the new session."

All those in favour of the amendment will please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

Arnott, Ted	Klees, Frank	Ouellette, Jerry J.
Bailey, Robert	Leone, Rob	Pettapiece, Randy
Barrett, Toby	MacLaren, Jack	Scott, Laurie
Chudleigh, Ted	MacLeod, Lisa	Shurman, Peter
Clark, Steve	McDonell, Jim	Smith, Todd
Dunlop, Garfield	McKenna, Jane	Thompson, Lisa M.
Elliott, Christine	McNaughton, Monte	Walker, Bill
Hardeman, Ernie	Miller, Norm	Wilson, Jim
Harris, Michael	Milligan, Rob E.	Yakabuski, John
Hillier, Randy	Munro, Julia	
Jackson, Rod	Nicholls, Rick	
Jones, Sylvia	O'Toole, John	

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): All those opposed to the amendment will please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Nays

Albanese, Laura	Duguid, Brad	Milloy, John
Armstrong, Teresa J.	Fife, Catherine	Moridi, Reza
Balkissoon, Bas	Flynn, Kevin Daniel	Murray, Glen R.
Bartolucci, Rick	Forster, Cindy	Naqvi, Yasir
Berardinetti, Lorenzo	Gerritsen, John	Natyhak, Taras
Bisson, Gilles	Gélinas, France	Oraziotti, David
Bradley, James J.	Horwath, Andrea	Piruzza, Teresa
Broten, Laurel C.	Hoskins, Eric	Prue, Michael
Campbell, Sarah	Jaczek, Helena	Qaadri, Shafiq
Cansfield, Donna H.	Jeffrey, Linda	Sandals, Liz
Chan, Michael	Kwinter, Monte	Schein, Jonah
Chiarelli, Bob	Leal, Jeff	Sergio, Mario
Colle, Mike	MacCharles, Tracy	Singh, Jagmeet
Coteau, Michael	Mangat, Amrit	Sousa, Charles
Crack, Grant	Mantha, Michael	Tabuns, Peter
Craitor, Kim	Marchese, Rosario	Taylor, Monique
Damerla, Dipika	Matthews, Deborah	Vanthof, John
Del Duca, Steven	Mauro, Bill	Wong, Soo
Delaney, Bob	McMeekin, Ted	Wynne, Kathleen O.
Dhillon, Vic	McNeely, Phil	Zimmer, David
Dickson, Joe	Meilleur, Madeleine	
DiNovo, Cheri	Miller, Paul	

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller):

The ayes are 34; the nays are 64.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I declare the motion lost.

Amendment negatived.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): If there are no further deferred votes, this House stands recessed until 3 p.m. this afternoon.

The House recessed from 1152 to 1500.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: I'm very pleased to introduce my chief of staff, Camille Gooden, who has just joined us in the members' gallery. Welcome.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

GENTLEMEN OF THE ROAD SIMCOE STOPOVER

Mr. Toby Barrett: In rural Ontario, when the hottest band in the world chooses your town as its only Canadian stop on an international tour, you know it's time to slip into your dancing galoshes for a real down-home boot-stompin' jamboree, so it is with unprecedented excitement that my local community has received news a couple of months ago that Grammy Award winners Mumford and Sons are ditching the mega-sized stadiums to play a two-day festival down in the town of Simcoe.

The multi-platinum-selling British folk band are bringing with them Edward Sharpe and the Magnetic Zeroes, Alabama Shakes, the Vaccines and others to the Norfolk County Fairgrounds on August 23 and 24 for their Gentlemen of the Road tour. The population of Simcoe will nearly double to 25,000 or, as the locals say, an average day at the Norfolk County Fair.

Mumford and Sons put out a media release: "The Gentlemen of the Road Stopovers are all about live music. We get to put them on in towns not normally frequented by touring bands in buses or splitter vans. We deliberately look for towns that have something unique, or some vibe of which they are proud, explore them and enjoy what they have to offer." So, we invite everybody to come down to Norfolk this summer and experience the vibe in our area that's attracting some of the biggest names in the music business.

AIR-RAIL LINK

Mr. Jonah Schein: Today I will reintroduce my private member's bill to push forward the electrification of the Union Pearson Express air-rail link. The Liberal government's decision to run diesel trains on this line has drawn widespread criticism, both for the negative health impacts it will have on our community and on our air quality and because it will fail to ease gridlock and move people effectively in our city.

For years, our west-end community has called for immediate electrification on the line. The Canadian Association of Physicians for the Environment, the Asthma Society of Canada and the medical officer of health for Toronto have all expressed concerns about the diesel plan, and they support immediate electrification. Toronto city council has passed a motion in favour of electrification, so as to allow additional stops on the route and provide an affordable downtown relief line in the west end of Toronto.

The Auditor General has questioned the government's business model for the proposed diesel line, calling Metrolinx's ridership projections "overly optimistic," as higher-than-usual fares will discourage ridership. Transit expert Joell Ann Vanderwagen called the Liberals' diesel plan "the worst current example of wasted resources and opportunity," and advocates for electric train service as "common sense," an "effective alternative that would create a GTA-wide rapid transit network now—not 30 years down the road." Just today, the world-renowned scientist David Suzuki added his voice to the growing list of people concerned about this government's plan.

So today I'm asking Premier Wynne and the Liberal government of Ontario to listen to these good people and to commit to do it once, do it right the first time and electrify the Union Pearson air-rail link from day one.

CARASSAUGA FESTIVAL

Mrs. Amrit Mangat: On May 24, I had the pleasure to be a part of the opening ceremony of the Carassauga festival at the Hershey Centre in my great riding of Mississauga—Brampton South. Carassauga is a festival of cultures which provides Ontarians an opportunity to discover the world in their own backyard.

This year, the attendees were introduced to the cultures of 72 countries. They experienced their dances, their music, their arts, their history, their dresses and their exotic foods.

Carassauga promotes, among citizens, an understanding and respect for difference. It is the celebration of Ontario's greatest strength, its diversity.

Mr. Speaker, I'm proud to be a part of a government which encourages its citizens to protect and promote their culture and heritage.

I would like to congratulate the Carassauga festival's organizing team and hundreds of volunteers for their enthusiasm, dedication and hard work.

JOHN VERWEY

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: I'm pleased to rise today to recognize John Verwey of Auburn, Ontario. He's a five-time Dominion Darts champion. But this isn't the first trophy—this last win—for John. As a member of the Royal Canadian Legion Branch 420 in Blyth, John was named Ontario Legion Men's Singles Champion and Darts Ontario Men's Singles Champion as well.

John's latest darts singles title was won early last month in Chester, Nova Scotia. He is the only player to have won more than two singles titles and the only player to have won the singles back-to-back title in 2012 and 2013—quite a feat.

John has taken his skills all the way to the world championships in England, and he has beaten some of professional darts' biggest names at the World Cup level, including three-time champion John Lowe.

John first got into playing darts as a pastime 25 years ago—something he and his wife, Heather, could play to spend time together. It soon grew to be a lot more. In 2007, he was ranked 32 in the world, and playing at the masters level. He skilfully moved up through the ranks.

John is married with three children. He is an electrician by trade at Bruce Power. Most importantly, he enjoys working on his farm and spending time with his grandchildren.

I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate John on all of his successes at the local, provincial, national and international levels.

DONNA-LYNN McCALLUM

Mr. Michael Prue: It is with a very heavy heart that I speak today about my friend Donna-Lynn McCallum. She died last week; we buried her on Monday.

Donna-Lynn McCallum was, of all who knew her—the proudest person I ever met to live in East York. She was part of Team East York, which helped to fight against the amalgamation of our beloved borough. But mostly in the community, she is remembered as being a photographer.

She was the person who accompanied me and so many others to every single community event for the last 20 years in East York, photographing and cataloguing the people, the events, the places, the times and all of those things that make East York a truly unique and wonderful community. She particularly loved going to events with the Tamil and Bangladeshi communities because of the colourful costumes. We just thought the world of her.

She was the recipient of an East York Bulldog, which was the highest award we could give to anybody, municipally. She received that Bulldog because of her dogged determination to keep politicians to account, both at city hall and at Queen's Park, in order to make sure our community was not forgotten.

This past year, we presented her with the Queen's Diamond Jubilee Medal for all of the wonderful photographs she has taken.

She will be missed by everyone in our community, and all we can say is, Godspeed, Donna-Lynn.

STELLA GEORGE

Ms. Soo Wong: I rise today to recognize the life of a remarkable woman and constituent of Scarborough-Agincourt, Stella George.

Stella was born on July 5, 1908, in Guyana and left in 1934 for England, where she trained as a midwife and joined the overseas nursing service. She was selected to work in Africa because of her African descent and went to Nigeria in 1935.

While living in Lagos, she saw that mothers would travel very far from outside the city, carrying their babies on their backs, in order to see one of the few available doctors. This inspired Stella to petition to the Nigerian government to set up medical clinics outside the city. As a result, the government began constructing these health clinics in 1948 and 1949 to service women and children beyond the city limits.

Trained as a midwife, she teamed up with doctors to offer services for women to give birth at home. After only one month, the team had delivered over 100 babies at home, and the service was later taken over by public health.

Stella George moved to Scarborough-Agincourt's St. Paul's L'Amoreaux Centre in 1985. There, she continued to volunteer and contributed well over 6,000 hours as a volunteer for over two decades.

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Stella always had a problem saying no to helping others. She would say, "When I do a little thing, it's a big thing to someone else. I feel so appreciated that I want to do more."

Mr. Speaker, this remarkable woman passed away peacefully on May 30, in her 104th year. I believe we can all learn from Stella's love for her neighbours and her commitment to her ideals.

ACCESSIBILITY FOR THE DISABLED

Mr. Monte McNaughton: Since my election in 2011, I have served my constituents using a customer service approach. We have opened four offices throughout my riding: one in Strathroy, one in Wallaceburg, and also in Glencoe and Forest.

I strive to make the services that are available as accessible as possible. That is why I recently made some changes to my MPP website, www.montemcnaughton-mpp.com, to make it more accessible for people with

physical disabilities. Everyone deserves to access important information and government services, so I was pleased to add an assistive technology application to my MPP website. The ESSENTIAL Accessibility application allows people to use voice-recognition technology to access vital government services.

I'm excited to be the first MPP in the province to offer this type of keyboard and mouse replacement solution for people with physical disabilities, and I would encourage all members of this House to do the same for their constituents.

PRISONERS' MASSACRE ANNIVERSARY

Ms. Helena Jaczek: There are many families of Iranian heritage in my great riding of Oak Ridges-Markham and in the Richmond Hill riding of my colleague MPP Reza Moridi, and many here with us today in the public gallery. I rise today to recognize a grim anniversary that our constituents will never forget.

This summer marks the 25th anniversary of the largest massacre of political prisoners in Iran. In the summer of 1988, thousands of political prisoners were executed without trial. Most conservative estimates suggest nearly 5,000 Iranian political prisoners lost their lives during this period.

Many independent legal assessments have concluded that the killings amount to crimes against humanity under international law. Those who carried out this massacre have never been brought to trial. The families of their victims here in Ontario and around the world await justice. Those who lost loved ones can never be truly whole. We want our constituents to know that we support them.

Today, Canada's federal members of Parliament will consider a motion at the House of Commons to recognize the 1988 summer massacre as constituting a crime against humanity. I hope that the loss felt by our constituents and by Iranians around the country is recognized by the federal government, and from its official recognition, they find some small measure of comfort.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The Minister of Research and Innovation on a point of order.

Hon. Reza Moridi: I have a point of order. I believe that we have unanimous consent to observe a moment of silence to commemorate the victims of the 1988 execution of Iranian political prisoners by the Islamic Republic of Iran.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The minister has asked for a moment of silence designating the massacre. With the members' permission, I will finish the statements and then come back at the end of statements for a moment of silence. Is that acceptable to the member?

Hon. Reza Moridi: Yes, Speaker.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

Unanimous consent: Agreed? Agreed. Thank you.

The member for Burlington.

BURLINGTON SOUND OF MUSIC FESTIVAL

Mrs. Jane McKenna: For the last 34 summers, the Burlington Sound of Music Festival has grown to become not just the city's premier festival but also one of the province's must-see attractions. The event draws close to a quarter-million visitors annually to the city's waterfront and downtown to enjoy a unique blend of new and emerging artists, Canadian icons and retro favourites.

Past performers include Tom Cochrane, Cowboy Junkies, Ronnie Hawkins, Natalie MacMaster, the Jim Cuddy Band, Serena Ryder, Tom Wilson, Tokyo Police Club, Devo, Men Without Hats, Carly Rae Jepsen, Arkells—the list goes on and on—alongside excellent homegrown acts like Finger Eleven and Walk Off The Earth.

This year's lineup will feature new wave icons the Spoons, a Burlington band that grew up alongside the festival. Just last year, the group celebrated the 30-year anniversary of its landmark album, *Arias and Symphonies*, and the hit single *Nova Heart*.

You'll also be able to catch acts like Raine Maida, Lights, 54-40, April Wine, illScarlett, Platinum Blonde, Jully Black, Honeymoon Suite, Alyssa Reid and many, many more. I would like to invite everyone in the Legislature, and all those tuning in across the province, to visit Burlington's Sound of Music Festival on the best day ever—besides Mother's Day—Father's Day, June 13 to 16, and to discover what all the buzz is about.

PRISONERS' MASSACRE ANNIVERSARY

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Pursuant to the unanimous consent to have a moment's silence for the individuals who lost their lives to this disaster, I would ask all members of the House to stand for a moment of silence.

The House observed a moment's silence.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I thank all members for their co-operation.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON REGULATIONS AND PRIVATE BILLS

Mr. Peter Tabuns: I beg leave to present a report from the Standing Committee on Regulations and Private Bills and move its adoption.

The Clerk-at-the-Table (Ms. Anne Stokes): Mr. Tabuns presents the committee's report as follows and moves its adoption:

Your committee begs to report the following bills without amendment:

Bill Pr10, An Act to revive Marsh & Co. Hospitality Realty Inc.

Bill Pr17, An Act to revive Triple "D" Holdings Ltd.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Shall the report be received and adopted? Agreed? Agreed. No further action required. Thank you.

Report adopted.

CORRECTION OF RECORD

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The Minister of Research and Innovation on a point of order.

Hon. Reza Moridi: I would like to correct my record. I said the year 1998; the actual year is 1988.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member has a right to correct his record, and that will now show.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

METROLINX AMENDMENT ACT, 2013

LOI DE 2013 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR METROLINX

Mr. Schein moved first reading of the following bill: Bill 84, An Act to amend the Metrolinx Act, 2006 / Projet de loi 84, Loi modifiant la Loi de 2006 sur Metrolinx.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member for a short statement.

Mr. Jonah Schein: My bill would pave the way for immediate electrification of the Union Pearson Express air-rail link. It amends the Metrolinx Act, 2006, to require Metrolinx to ensure that any passenger railway system established between downtown Toronto and Toronto Pearson International Airport is not powered by diesel fuel. This is my second time introducing this bill.

COMPANIES STATUTE LAW AMENDMENT ACT, 2013

LOI DE 2013 MODIFIANT DES LOIS VISANT LES COMPAGNIES

Ms. MacCharles moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 85, An Act to amend various companies statutes and to amend other statutes consequential to the Not-for-Profit Corporations Act, 2010 / Projet de loi 85, Loi modifiant diverses lois visant les compagnies et apportant à d'autres lois des modifications corrélatives découlant de la Loi de 2010 sur les organisations sans but lucratif.

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The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member for a short statement.

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: Speaker, I'll make my comments during ministerial statements, please.

INFRASTRUCTURE ACCOUNTABILITY ACT, 2013 LOI DE 2013 SUR LA RESPONSABILISATION EN MATIÈRE D'INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr. Jackson moved first reading of the following bill: Bill 86, An Act to amend the Ministry of Infrastructure Act, 2011 with respect to public works agreements / Projet de loi 86, Loi modifiant la Loi de 2011 sur le ministère de l'Infrastructure en ce qui concerne les ententes sur les ouvrages publics.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member for a short statement.

Mr. Rod Jackson: This act will see to it that if any infrastructure project over \$5 million that has been entered into by the government is exited by the government within a writ period, all executive council pay is docked for 25%. That's all executive council, for 25%, for one full year, for the time they are an MPP.

SPCA OVERSIGHT ACT, 2013

LOI DE 2013 SUR LA SURVEILLANCE DE LA SPAO

Mr. MacLaren moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 87, An Act to amend the Ontario Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act / Projet de loi 87, Loi modifiant la Loi sur la Société de protection des animaux de l'Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member for a short statement.

Mr. Jack MacLaren: Mr. Speaker, the new section 21.1 of the act gives the Ombudsman the power, under the Ombudsman Act, to investigate complaints relating to the society, affiliated societies and the Animal Care Review Board.

CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICES AMENDMENT ACT (CHILDREN 16 YEARS OF AGE AND OLDER), 2013

LOI DE 2013 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LES SERVICES À L'ENFANCE ET À LA FAMILLE (ENFANTS DE 16 ANS ET PLUS)

Mr. Jackson moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 88, An Act to amend the Child and Family Services Act with respect to children 16 years of age and older / Projet de loi 88, Loi modifiant la Loi sur les

services à l'enfance et à la famille en ce qui concerne les enfants de 16 ans et plus.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member for a short statement.

Mr. Rod Jackson: This bill looks to bring Ontario into—actually honour the United Nations convention with respect to children. Currently, we're the only jurisdiction in the developed world that does not provide adequate resources for children who go into care at the age of 16, 17 or 18. Right now, if you're a child and you go into care and you're 15 years old, you get support through CAS and other means up until the age of 21. If you go into care when you're 16 years old, you have absolutely no resources available to you, aside from Ontario Works, the medical system and other public resources.

This actually will cost the government less money to deal with a problem at the front end rather than the back end, and it'll help children who are 16 years old, 17 years old and 18 years old have resources to be able to succeed in the society that we have today.

OSPCA FAIRNESS ACT, 2013

LOI DE 2013 SUR L'ÉQUITÉ À LA SPAO

Mr. MacLaren moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 89, An Act to amend the Ontario Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act / Projet de loi 89, Loi modifiant la Loi sur la Société de protection des animaux de l'Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member for a short statement.

Mr. Jack MacLaren: Mr. Speaker, section 15 of the act currently permits the society to serve on an animal's owner or custodian a statement of account respecting the food, care or treatment that an inspector or agent of the society provided to the animal. If the owner or custodian refuses to pay or cannot be found, the society has the power to sell or dispose of the animal. That section is repealed and replaced with a rule that provides that under no circumstances is an owner or custodian required to pay the cost to the society or an affiliated society for providing food, care or treatment to an animal.

Further, new section 15.0.1 of the act provides rules concerning when an animal may be returned to its owner or custodian in circumstances where the owner or custodian has been charged with an offence pertaining to the welfare of animals or the prevention of cruelty to animals and the animal has been taken into custody by the society or an affiliated society.

ONTARIO SOCIETY FOR THE PREVENTION OF CRUELTY TO ANIMALS AMENDMENT ACT (CHOICE OF VETERINARIAN), 2013

LOI DE 2013 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LA SOCIÉTÉ DE PROTECTION DES ANIMAUX DE L'ONTARIO (CHOIX DU VÉTÉRINAIRE)

Mr. MacLaren moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 90, An Act to amend the Ontario Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act / Projet de loi 90, Loi modifiant la Loi sur la Société de protection des animaux de l'Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member for a short statement.

Mr. Jack MacLaren: Mr. Speaker, sections 11.4 to 14 of the act currently permit veterinarians to perform various functions, such as accompanying inspectors or agents of the society during inspections, providing treatment and care to an animal and providing advice about the removal and destruction of an animal. New section 14.1 of the act allows animal owners or custodians to select the veterinarian or approve the choice of the veterinarian.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Further introduction of bills?

It is now time for ministerial statements. The Minister of Consumer Services—forgive me; my apologies. I did something I'm not supposed to do, and that is to miss motions.

Motions? Motions? Last call for motions. Thank you.

It is now time for ministerial statements.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Liberals don't want to work.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Do I hear someone heckling?

The Minister of Consumer Services.

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

NOT-FOR PROFIT CORPORATIONS

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: In 2010, Ontario's Not-for-Profit Corporations Act, or ONCA, was passed in this Legislature with the support of all three parties. This reflects ONCA's importance as foundational legislation, providing modern corporate law to the province's more than 50,000 not-for-profit corporations. The act establishes modern governance rules for what we call the third sector. Not-for-profit corporations contribute \$50 billion to the province's economy and employ 15% of our total workforce.

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But even with the passing of ONCA, our work is not finished. In order for ONCA to be proclaimed and for it to come into force, today I'm introducing the Companies Statute Law Amendment Act, 2013. This bill proposes consequential, clarifying and transitional amendments that are required to proclaim ONCA.

ONCA is targeted to come into effect no earlier than January 2014, to give the sector time to make the changes and adjustments that the new law will require. These amendments would affect 86 statutes overseen by more than 15 ministries in the Ontario government. They are all minor, non-contentious, technical amendments. Many of these amendments would simply update references to the 60-year-old Corporations Act that currently governs most not-for-profit corporations in Ontario. Until this act is passed, ONCA, which has broad support of stakeholders in the not-for-profit sector, cannot be proclaimed.

The amendments I'm tabling today are critical to provide up-to-date rules to govern Ontario's not-for-profit organizations and, if passed, would help ensure greater transparency and accountability.

The proposed consequential amendments, if passed, would, for example, change references in the statutes from the current Corporations Act to ONCA, which will generally govern Ontario's not-for-profit corporations once it is proclaimed. The proposed clarifying amendments would address provisions that may be ambiguous in ONCA and the Corporations Act. The proposed transitional amendments would address items to facilitate a corporation's transition from one act to another.

A proposed amendment, if passed, would also respond to a key concern of stakeholders in clarifying that new, limited voting rights for non-members would apply during the three-year transition period for existing not-for-profit corporations. This would provide more time to work on this aspect with the sector.

ONCA will provide not-for-profit corporations with many benefits, including more modern corporate governance, improved accountability and an easier process to incorporate. We are working very closely with stakeholders and groups such as Community Legal Education Ontario group to develop tools and supports for a smooth transition and implementation.

Let's take the steps to complete this very important journey that this House began three years ago. A thriving, modern not-for-profit sector is depending on all of us to fulfill this commitment.

SEXUAL HARASSMENT AWARENESS WEEK

SEMAINE DE SENSIBILISATION AU HARCELEMENT SEXUEL

Hon. Laurel C. Brotin: I stand today to recognize the week of June 1 through 7 as Sexual Harassment Awareness Week in Ontario.

C'est l'occasion pour tous les Ontariens et Ontariennes de réfléchir à ce que nous pouvons faire pour mettre fin au harcèlement sexuel dans notre société.

This is a week for all Ontarians to consider what we can do to eliminate sexual harassment in our society. Writing in 1979, legal scholar Catharine A. MacKinnon defined sexual harassment as "the unwanted imposition of sexual requirements in the context of a relationship of unequal power." And while this broad definition still applies, I think we would all agree that derogatory comments based on sexual orientation or gender identity also constitute sexual harassment.

What Professor MacKinnon could not have anticipated over 30 years ago was the advent of the digital age and the many new forms of sexual harassment it has enabled. In fact, 95% of online harassment is directed at women. Who in 1979 could have imagined that a woman could be harassed in the privacy of her own room by an unknown person halfway around the world, or that this harassment could be secretly recorded, easily distributed and almost impossible to fully erase.

Les victimes de cette forme de harcèlement subissent un traumatisme mental et social inimaginable, dont les conséquences sont parfois tragiques. Nous devons impérativement réagir à ces menaces.

Victims of such harassment suffer unimaginable mental and social harm, with sometimes tragic consequences. It is imperative that we respond to these threats.

As minister responsible for women's issues for the past four years, I am proud of the steps our government has taken to prevent sexual harassment. We support Western University's learning network, which is researching and providing practical tools to respond to technology-based violence against women. We also support a social marketing public education campaign that integrates a focus on cybersexual violence.

We've urged the federal government to amend the Criminal Code of Canada to make it an offence to distribute intimate visual recordings of a person without that person's consent. And in 2012, our government passed the Accepting Schools Act, which requires school boards to prevent and address bullying, discrimination and harassment among students in our schools.

Ces mesures visent à créer un Ontario libre de toute violence sexuelle et de tout harcèlement sexuel. Nous avons tous le devoir d'apprendre ce que nous pouvons faire pour mettre fin au harcèlement sexuel et favoriser des relations égales et saines.

These are steps we're taking towards achieving an Ontario that is free from sexual violence and harassment. We all have a responsibility to learn what we can do to stop sexual harassment and support equal, healthy relationships.

Earlier this year, former executive director of UN Women, Michelle Bachelet, said, "We find ourselves at a unique global moment and opportunity. The momentum is there to break through the barriers to ending sexual violence and harassment in public spaces."

Let us seize this momentum and take the necessary steps to create communities—online, in schools and in

workplaces—that are free from gender inequality, discrimination and any form of harassment.

Cette semaine, et tout au long de l'année, montrons que l'Ontario est bien une société juste, sûre et équitable.

Let us demonstrate this week and throughout the year that Ontario is indeed a fair, safe and just society.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Statements by ministries?

It's time for responses.

NOT-FOR-PROFIT CORPORATIONS

Mr. Jim McDonell: I'm happy to rise to speak to the bill on the not-for-profit corporations. I think these corporations play a huge part in our communities. These are like-minded people that get together, in many cases not from the point of view of making money from it but for the betterment of the community.

I myself was involved in a few of these, in my former role as the mayor of South Glengarry, our Glengarry nurse-practitioner clinic—I was there when the organization started up, and we had to go through the regulations to put it in place—nothing short of a major hurdle for a group of volunteers who really pulled together in their own free time.

I'm happy to see that there have been some changes where, actually, we encourage and we make it easier for these volunteers, in most cases, or in all cases, to come together and do something that's for the good of the community.

I've had a severe concern when I look at the trouble with getting volunteers over the last number of years. There seems to be fewer numbers of people willing to donate their time. In many cases, it's the same people in multiple organizations. That speaks more so, because there's nobody else to do the work.

Some of these organizations have to be set up so that they can get results, they can be a little bit of fun. Liability can be limited, so that people aren't threatening their own livelihoods when they're involved with these organizations.

I look forward to looking at the bill in detail. I think that we've heard some comments from some of the not-for-profits that are really having a hard time to survive. One not-for-profit in my area, the Maple Ridge Cemetery—really looking after the cemetery in North Dundas. The alternative to that would be turning it back to the township, at a huge cost. This group was just looking to survive, to the point where the money they were raising was going into admin, insurance, things that really didn't help the organization. To take that over, from the township's point of view, would be in the neighbourhood of \$40,000.

You can see just what the drain would be on society if we didn't have these. I'll let my colleague talk on the other bill. I'm certainly looking forward to this.

SEXUAL HARASSMENT AWARENESS WEEK

Ms. Laurie Scott: As the PC critic for women's issues, I'm pleased today to rise on behalf of Tim Hudak

and the PC caucus to mark Sexual Harassment Awareness Week.

Since I assumed the critic role, it seems that I have made a lot of statements on the subject of sexual harassment and sexual assault, most recently on May 1, marking Sexual Assault Prevention Month. Unfortunately, it's a sad commentary that these issues are not going away.

1540

Sexual harassment is a form of bullying that can have tragic consequences for its victims. For those on the receiving end, sexual harassment can represent a life-altering event that has changed them so drastically that they never fully recover from it. It can take many forms. It can be ugly and direct, such as leering or unwelcome touching or sexual invitations; and it can also be an insensitive attempt at humour, with the hurt and discomfort often unintentional.

All these forms of harassment, I think we all agree, need to stop. For an advanced and educated society, this type of behaviour is not acceptable. The most recent sexual harassment data for Canada indicates that in the previous 12 months, 10% of women between the ages of 18 and 24 experienced sexual harassment in the workplace, and of the reported cases of workplace sexual harassment, 55% were perpetuated by co-workers.

Surveys repeatedly show that 90% of Canadian women claim to have experienced some form of sexual harassment during their working lives. Just this week, we read in the paper about the young girl who was followed off the bus by a bus driver harassing her and making improper overtures. If it weren't for the quick thinking of this young lady, the situation could have had very tragic results. I think we all feel it's a heartfelt tragedy that this still exists so prevalently in our society.

I know there are many good community groups and individuals that offer support, and I thank them for their dedicated efforts all across our communities. I know in Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock, my riding, Kawartha/Haliburton Victim Services provides direct support and referral services to the residents of Haliburton county and the city of Kawartha Lakes, in partnership with police emergency services and community agencies.

I thank them again for their dedication to solving this, I would say, escalating and frightening statistic that we have in our society. I'm glad to have the opportunity to speak and to raise awareness continuously for this in our society, so that we can make things better.

NOT-FOR-PROFIT CORPORATIONS

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: I take great pride in rising today on behalf of the NDP and our leader, Andrea Horwath, in response to the not-for-profit amendment act.

The non-profit sector is a very crucial sector in our communities. In fact, much of the great work that is accomplished and that is done in communities outside of

the public sector is done by not-for-profit organizations and groups.

The non-profit sector is not only economically important and vital to our society, representing 7.1% of Ontario's GDP and providing over a million jobs, but it is essential as a social tool to creating change.

As it stands, from consultations with the Ontario Non-profit Network, the current existing legislation that governs not-for-profit corporations has certain limitations which would have created barriers to these non-profit sector organizations. So these amendments are vital to ensure that these great organizations are able to do the good work they do.

There are many sectors where, if we encourage more non-profit or not-for-profit corporations, we could see great additions or great benefits to our society, particularly where profits would put in question the quality of services. For example, child care and care for our seniors: The non-profit sector would create a viable alternative to public services. It's something that could provide a complement to public services. It's a great opportunity for us to allow an alternative and viable source of great care, where we are not putting profits before people, but where we are putting the needs and the benefits of our community, of the clients, ahead of profits.

I'm very happy that these amendments—if, in my cursory, brief overview of them, they do satisfy these concerns—look like they will address the issues of governance with respect to members' rights. They will allow the operations of non-profit organizations to benefit their communities in the best way possible.

One of the particular concerns that the Ontario Nonprofit Network addressed was the fact that 25% to 30% of not-for-profits' membership is embedded in their operations. Without these amendments, they would be subject to a significant disruption if a small fraction of their members were dissatisfied. These amendments will allow for non-profits to work in a very efficient manner.

I support this bill and I look forward to reading it in further detail.

SEXUAL HARASSMENT AWARENESS WEEK

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: It's my honour to rise for the NDP and our leader, Andrea Horwath, to speak to Sexual Harassment Awareness Week. You know, really, there are two parts to the answer to this—let's not focus on the problem; let's focus on some solutions here.

One is to address inequality, which is still rampant, because those who are unequal, those who are oppressed are picked on more. That's just true no matter what the issue, and women are still unequal to men in this community.

In Ontario, we make 72 cents on the dollar. Our Victim Services just around the corner—the only Victim Services that handles clients, victims of sexual harassment across the Toronto area—is working on about

10% of what it used to work on per client in terms of funding. We're not funding that. One in every 100 workplaces ever sees somebody from the Ministry of Labour. So, good luck if you're harassed at work. Most women just leave or get fired. That's the reality. Nobody is there to help them. We know that. We hear about that.

Forty per cent of all boards in Canada have no women on them at all. That's unacceptable. That's inequality. As long as that exists, we'll still have this problem.

Number two, education: Yesterday we had some educators here, and they were talking about beefing up our programs in our schools. Many years ago, I tabled a bill called Holly's Law, named after Holly Jones, a poor little girl who was killed. It was her mother, Maria Jones, who was the impetus behind that. She was saying that they need to have training materials in every school so that little children—children of all ages—can learn to speak to their teachers and to an adult about what is bothering them and who is bothering them. This speaks to online harassment. Again, the government was extremely resistant to doing that.

Our teachers need to be able to talk about what is appropriate and inappropriate behaviour. That's also critical, and that has to be looked at as well. So if we approach it as a solution, a base problem rather than as an intractable one, we can actually do something about this. We need to face up to inequality and really redirect our funds to education.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I thank all members for their statements. It is now time for petitions. I'm told that I should go to the member from Durham, because he's going to be very brief.

PETITIONS

WATER QUALITY

Mr. John O'Toole: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to present a petition from the riding of Durham. It reads as follows—

Interjection.

Mr. John O'Toole: It's a new one, actually.

"Whereas under the Health Protection and Promotion Act, Ontario regulation 319/08, public health inspectors are required to undertake risk assessments of small drinking water systems;

"Whereas many of these small drinking water systems are located in homes operating bed and breakfasts in rural Ontario;

"Whereas private homes that are the sites of bed and breakfasts already have potable drinking water used by the homeowners and their families every day;

"Whereas many of these bed and breakfasts have established the quality of their drinking water through years of regular testing;

"Whereas these home-based businesses are facing high costs to comply with the new requirements of regulation 319/08;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Minister of Health amend Ontario regulation 319/08 to give the testing track record of a small drinking water system greater weight in the risk assessment process. Furthermore we, the undersigned, ask that bed and breakfasts operated within a private home with a drinking water supply meeting all the requirements of a private home not be subject to regulation 319/08."

I'm pleased to present this on behalf of Jane Smith and others, and present it to Carlo, one of the pages here.

PAN AM GAMES

Mr. Rosario Marchese: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the University of Toronto, with Infrastructure Ontario, approved a plan to replace grass with synthetic turf on its back campus field for the 2015 Pan/Parapan Am Games; and

"Whereas the back campus plan will degrade the fabric of the campus and destroy one of the most substantial green spaces in downtown Toronto;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Legislative Assembly direct the minister responsible for the Pan/Parapan Am Games to withdraw his support for this project and seek a sustainable alternative venue to the back campus field. The back campus is one of the original features of the university and a cultural heritage landscape. Designed with restrictive specifications for international field hockey ... pitches, the plan raises many social and environmental concerns. The government of Ontario and the University of Toronto ought to lead the world in designing sustainable open spaces for Canada's largest city."

I'm a big supporter of this petition, and I will sign it.

1550

ALZHEIMER'S DISEASE

Mrs. Donna H. Cansfield: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas Alzheimer's disease is a degenerative brain disease that causes thinking and memory impairment. Alzheimer's disease is progressive, worsens over time, and will eventually lead to death;

"Whereas there are an estimated" 200,000 "Ontarians diagnosed with Alzheimer's and related dementia today, and that number is set to increase by 40% in the next 10 years;

"Whereas Alzheimer's disease creates social, emotional and economic burdens on the family and friends of those suffering with the disease;

"Whereas the total economic burden of dementia in Ontario is expected to increase by more than \$770 million per year through to 2020;

"We, the undersigned, call upon the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to establish an Alzheimer's advisory council to advise the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care on matters pertaining to strategy respecting research, treatment and the prevention of Alzheimer's and other related dementia."

I am delighted to affix my name and to give it to Lamiha.

PHYSIOTHERAPY SERVICES

Mr. Jerry J. Ouellette: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas the Ministry of Health is planning to delist OHIP physiotherapy clinics as of August 1st, 2013, which represents cuts in physiotherapy services to seniors, children and people with disabilities who currently receive care at designated OHIP physiotherapy clinics; and

"Whereas people who are currently eligible for OHIP physiotherapy treatments can receive 100 treatments per year plus an additional 50 treatments annually if medically necessary. The proposed change will reduce the number of allowable treatments to 12 per year; while enhancing geographical access is positive, the actual physiotherapy that any individual receives will be greatly reduced; and

"Whereas the current OHIP physiotherapy providers have been providing seniors, children and people with disabilities with individualized treatments for over 48 years, and these services have been proven to help improve function, mobility, activities of daily living, pain, and falls risk;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To review and reverse the decision to drastically cut OHIP physiotherapy services to our most vulnerable population—seniors, children and people with disabilities; and to maintain the policy that seniors, children and people with disabilities continue to receive up to 100 treatments per year at eligible clinics, with a mechanism to access an additional 50 treatments when medically necessary."

I affix my signature in support.

ONTARIO MUNICIPAL BOARD

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: This is a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas the Ontario Municipal Board is a provincial agency composed of unelected members unaccountable to Ontarians; and

"Whereas the Ontario Municipal Board has the power to unilaterally alter local development decisions made by municipalities and their communities; and

"Whereas the city of Toronto is the largest city in Ontario; and

"Whereas the city of Toronto has a planning department composed of professional planners, an extensive legal department and 44 full-time city councillors directly elected by its citizens; and

"Whereas Toronto's city council voted overwhelmingly in February 2012 to request an exemption from the Ontario Municipal Board's jurisdiction;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to recognize the ability of the city of Toronto to handle its own urban planning and development; and

"Further, that the Ontario Municipal Board no longer have jurisdiction over the city of Toronto."

I couldn't agree more; I will affix my signature and give it to Jessica to take to the table.

CHILD CUSTODY

Mr. Kim Craitor: This petition is to the Legislative Assembly on behalf of grandparents:

"Whereas the people of Ontario deserve and have the right to request an amendment to the Children's Law Reform Act to emphasize the importance of children's relationships with their grandparents as requested in Bill 48 put forward by MPP Kim Craitor; and

"Whereas currently, subsection 21(1) of the act provides that a parent of a child or any other person may apply to a court for certain orders respecting custody of or access to the child. An amendment to that subsection specifies that a grandparent may apply for such an order; and

"Whereas currently subclause 24(2)(a)(i) of the act provides that where a court makes a determination relating to certain applications in respect of custody of or access to a child, the court shall consider, among other things, the love, affection and emotional ties between the child and each person entitled to or claiming custody of or access to the child. An amendment to that subclause specifies that this includes grandparents; and

"Whereas relationships between children and grandparents are a special bond that should be maintained;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to amend the Children's Law Reform Act to emphasize the importance of children's relationships with their grandparents."

I'm pleased to sign my name to this petition.

PHYSIOTHERAPY SERVICES

Mr. Todd Smith: I'm pleased to present this on behalf of hundreds of residents of Prince Edward-Hastings and across Ontario.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Ministry of Health is planning on cutting physiotherapy services to seniors in long-term-

care homes—from an estimated \$110 million to \$58.5 million; and

"Whereas with this change seniors will not receive the care they are currently entitled to through their current OHIP physiotherapy providers, who the government plans to delist from OHIP on August 1st, 2013; and

"Whereas the government has announced that the funding level, the number of treatments a resident could receive, has not been specified and will be reduced from a maximum of 150 visits/year to some unknown level, which means the hours of care and number of staff providing seniors with physiotherapy will also be significantly reduced as of August 1st, 2013; and

"Whereas our current OHIP physiotherapy providers have been providing seniors with individualized treatments for over 48 years, and these services have been proven to help seniors improve in their activities of daily living, mobility, pain and falls risk;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To review and reverse this drastic cut of OHIP physiotherapy services to seniors, our most vulnerable population, and to continue with \$110 million physiotherapy funding for seniors in long-term-care homes."

PROPERTY TAXATION

Mr. John Vanthof: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas a number of major companies in the forest sector have filed appeals to the Assessment Review Board (ARB) to reclaim a significant portion of their municipal property taxes paid across the province during the years 2005, 2006, 2007 and 2008; and

"Whereas Domtar Inc. has filed such an appeal related to property taxes paid to the township of James for the years 2005, 2006, 2007 and 2008; and

"Whereas decisions made by the ARB are retroactive resulting in rebates being ordered despite the fact that services were provided in good faith based on values provided by the Municipal Property Assessment Corp. (MPAC);

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"1. There will be a toll of \$0.37/cu.m. charged on wood travelling on municipal streets/roads retroactive to the first date of appeal.

"2. Applications for provincial funding should be revised to include a condition that only applicants who have not appealed their municipal property assessment within the past five years be considered.

"3. The province will assume payments of all municipal property tax rebates awarded to the forest industry."

I agree with the intent of this petition, would like to sign it and give it to page Melanie.

ALZHEIMER'S DISEASE

Mrs. Donna H. Cansfield: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas Alzheimer's disease is a degenerative brain disease that causes thinking and memory impairment. Alzheimer's disease is progressive, worsens over time, and will eventually lead to death;

"Whereas there are an estimated" 200,000 "Ontarians diagnosed with Alzheimer's and related dementia today, and that number is set to increase by 40% in the next 10 years;

"Whereas Alzheimer's disease creates social, emotional and economic burdens on the family and friends of those suffering with the disease;

"Whereas the total economic burden of dementia in Ontario is expected to increase by more than \$770 million per year through to 2020;

"We, the undersigned, call upon the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to establish an Alzheimer's advisory council to advise the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care on matters pertaining to strategy respecting research, treatment and the prevention of Alzheimer's and other related dementia."

I'll sign my name and give this to Jimmy.

PHYSIOTHERAPY SERVICES

Mr. Jeff Yurek: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Ministry of Health plans to eliminate OHIP funded physiotherapy services currently offered in retirement homes by the lowest cost providers—designated physiotherapy clinics—in order to switch service providers on August 1, 2013;

"Whereas the total level of funding available for physiotherapy services for seniors and eligible patients will be reduced by \$16 million;

"Whereas the ministry intends to reallocate funding through the LHINs and CCACs for the administration and procurement of physiotherapy services in effect creating an additional, costly level of bureaucracy; **1600**

"Whereas current designated physiotherapy providers—that have a proven 48 year track record of improving seniors' activities of daily life, mobility, pain, and falls risk—will be delisted from OHIP;

"Whereas the largest growing segment of the population is seniors whose access to physiotherapy services will be greatly impaired by this decision;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To review and reverse the Ministry of Health's decisions to delist designated physiotherapy providers from OHIP and reduce the number of treatments seniors and eligible patients have access to at a retirement home."

I agree with this petition and affix my signature.

LONG-TERM CARE

Mr. Michael Mantha: Today I have, once again, hundreds of signatures, which were presented to both

myself and my colleague from Nickel Belt from residents along Manitoulin Island, across the north shore.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas Ontario ranks ninth of 10 provinces in terms of the total per capita funding allocated to long-term care; and

"Whereas the Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care data shows that there are more than 30,000 people in Ontario waiting for long-term-care placements and wait-times have tripled since 2005; and

"Whereas there is a perpetual shortage of staff in long-term-care facilities and residents often wait an unreasonable length of time to receive care—e.g. to be attended to for toileting needs; to be fed; to receive a bath; for pain medication. Since 2008, funding for 2.8 paid hours of care per resident per day has been provided. In that budget year, a promise was made to increase this funding to 4.0 hours per resident per day by 2012. This has not been done; and

"Whereas the personal support worker program has no provincial governing body that would provide provincial standards and regulation to assure the best care for residents who are being admitted with higher physical, psychological and emotional needs. Currently, training across the province is varied, inconsistent and insufficient;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to:

"(1) immediately increase the number of paid hours of nursing and personal care per resident per day to 4.0 hours (as promised in 2008);

"(2) develop a plan to phase in future increases so that the number of paid hours per resident per day of nursing and personal care is 5.0 hours by January 2015;

"(3) establish a licensing body, such as a college, that will provide registration, accreditation and certification for all personal support workers in the province."

I support this petition and I will present it to page Laura to bring it down to the table.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The time for petitions is over.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

ORDER OF BUSINESS

Resuming the debate adjourned on June 4, 2013, on the amendment to the motion to apply a timetable to certain business of the House.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The rotation goes to the NDP. Not saying? Then the government House leader.

Hon. John Milloy: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to be standing here today to speak, I guess technically now, on the amendment to the motion.

I want to walk members through where we are right now in terms of the motion in front of the House. As members know, we began debating on this programming

motion over a week ago. Since that time, this matter has completely dominated the business of the House. According to our records, 37 members have now had the opportunity to speak to the programming motion and the subsequent amendments; 28 of those members are from the official opposition.

Debate on the programming motion has been wide-ranging. Members have had the opportunity to speak not only to the amendments, but also to the original motion itself.

Our party has made it clear that we support this motion; the third party has made it clear in their speeches that they support this motion. The official opposition are the only ones intent on continuing this debate, and it seems their goal is simply to delay.

The motion has already been debated for almost 13 hours, and as I said when I first spoke to these issues, when I spoke to the motion itself, the programming motion itself is a simple procedural motion. It sets out a process for Bill 65, the budget bill, to go to a second reading vote to be dealt with at committee in a reasonable length of time, and then to come back here again to this House for a reasonable debate around third reading, should it pass committee.

It is a simple procedural motion and it's time that it comes to a vote. It's time to get Bill 65 into committee. There are important time-sensitive items in Bill 65, and the process for passage of the bill needs to be moved along. It's important that the committee begin its process.

At the same time, this House can move on to debate substantive matters. There are a number of pieces of important legislation already introduced which the government would like to debate and move through the legislative process. We can't devote the necessary time to these important matters if we are forced to continue debating this procedural motion.

For example, Mr. Speaker, we have Bill 51, Security for Courts, Electricity Generating Facilities and Nuclear Facilities Act; Bill 55, Stronger Protection for Ontario Consumers Act, which has only been debated for just over an hour; Bill 30, the Skin Cancer Protection Act or, as it's called, the tanning beds act; Bill 21, Employment Standards Amendment Act, or the family caregiver leave act, as it's often called.

Yesterday, my colleague introduced the Protection of Public Participation Act, an important piece of legislation that aims to tackle strategic lawsuits that curb democratic rights. We'd like to spend time debating that legislation, but we can't until the programming motion is dealt with.

As a result, I move that this question now be put.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Mr. Milloy has moved that the question be now put. It's my ruling that there has been enough debate on this—over 12 hours.

Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I heard some noes.

All those in favour will please say "aye."

All those opposed will please say "nay."

I believe the nays have it, in my opinion.

This will be a 30-minute bell. Call in the members.

The division bells rang from 1608 to 1638.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Members, please take your seats.

Mr. Milloy has moved that the question be now put.

All those in favour of the motion, please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

Albanese, Laura	DiNovo, Cheri	Meilleur, Madeleine
Armstrong, Teresa J.	Duguid, Brad	Milloy, John
Balkissoon, Bas	Fife, Catherine	Moridi, Reza
Bartolucci, Rick	Flynn, Kevin Daniel	Murray, Glen R.
Berardineti, Lorenzo	Forster, Cindy	Naqvi, Yasir
Bisson, Gilles	Gerretsen, John	Natshyak, Taras
Bradley, James J.	Gélinas, France	Oraziotti, David
Broten, Laurel C.	Horwath, Andrea	Piruzza, Teresa
Campbell, Sarah	Hoskins, Eric	Prue, Michael
Cansfield, Donna H.	Jaczek, Helena	Qaadri, Shafiq
Chan, Michael	Jeffrey, Linda	Sandals, Liz
Chiarelli, Bob	Kwinter, Monte	Schein, Jonah
Colle, Mike	Leal, Jeff	Sergio, Mario
Coteau, Michael	MacCharles, Tracy	Singh, Jagmeet
Crack, Grant	Mangat, Amrit	Sousa, Charles
Craitor, Kim	Mantha, Michael	Tabuns, Peter
Damerla, Dipika	Marchese, Rosario	Vanthof, John
Del Duca, Steven	Matthews, Deborah	Wong, Soo
Delaney, Bob	Mauro, Bill	Wynne, Kathleen O.
Dhillon, Vic	McMeekin, Ted	Zimmer, David
Dickson, Joe	McNeely, Phil	

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): All those opposed?

Nays

Arnett, Ted	Klees, Frank	Ouellette, Jerry J.
Bailey, Robert	Leone, Rob	Pettapiece, Randy
Barrett, Toby	MacLaren, Jack	Scott, Laurie
Chudleigh, Ted	MacLeod, Lisa	Shurman, Peter
Clark, Steve	McDonell, Jim	Smith, Todd
Dunlop, Garfield	McKenna, Jane	Thompson, Lisa M.
Elliott, Christine	McNaughton, Monte	Walker, Bill
Hardeman, Ernie	Milligan, Rob E.	Wilson, Jim
Hillier, Randy	Munro, Julia	Yakabuski, John
Jackson, Rod	Nicholls, Rick	Yurek, Jeff
Jones, Sylvia	O'Toole, John	

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 62; the nays are 32.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): I declare the motion carried.

The question is now on the main motion. On May 28, Mr. Milloy moved government notice of motion 19. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

Hearing a no, all those in favour will please say "aye."

All those opposed will please say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

Call in the members; this will be a 30-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1641 to 1642.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): On May 28, Mr. Milloy moved government notice of motion 19, applying the timetable to the consideration of certain business of this House.

All those in favour of this motion will please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

Albanese, Laura	DiNovo, Cheri	Meilleur, Madeleine
Armstrong, Teresa J.	Duguid, Brad	Milloy, John
Balkissoon, Bas	Fife, Catherine	Moridi, Reza
Bartolucci, Rick	Flynn, Kevin Daniel	Murray, Glen R.

Berardinetti, Lorenzo
 Bisson, Gilles
 Bradley, James J.
 Broten, Laurel C.
 Campbell, Sarah
 Cansfield, Donna H.
 Chan, Michael
 Chiarelli, Bob
 Colle, Mike
 Coteau, Michael
 Crack, Grant
 Craitor, Kim
 Damerla, Dipika
 Del Duca, Steven
 Delaney, Bob
 Dhillon, Vic
 Dickson, Joe

Forster, Cindy
 Gerretsen, John
 Gélinas, France
 Horwath, Andrea
 Hoskins, Eric
 Jaczek, Helena
 Jeffrey, Linda
 Kwinter, Monte
 Leal, Jeff
 MacCharles, Tracy
 Mangat, Amrit
 Mantha, Michael
 Marchese, Rosario
 Matthews, Deborah
 Mauro, Bill
 McMeekin, Ted
 McNeely, Phil

Naqvi, Yasir
 Natyshak, Taras
 Orazietti, David
 Piruzza, Teresa
 Prue, Michael
 Qaadi, Shafiq
 Sandals, Liz
 Schein, Jonah
 Sergio, Mario
 Singh, Jagmeet
 Sousa, Charles
 Tabuns, Peter
 Vanthof, John
 Wong, Soo
 Wynne, Kathleen O.
 Zimmer, David

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): All those opposed to the motion, please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Nays

Arnett, Ted	Klees, Frank	Ouellette, Jerry J.
Bailey, Robert	Leone, Rob	Pettapiece, Randy
Barrett, Toby	MacLaren, Jack	Scott, Laurie
Chudleigh, Ted	MacLeod, Lisa	Shurman, Peter
Clark, Steve	McDonell, Jim	Smith, Todd
Dunlop, Garfield	McKenna, Jane	Thompson, Lisa M.
Elliott, Christine	McNaughton, Monte	Walker, Bill
Hardeman, Ernie	Milligan, Rob E.	Wilson, Jim
Hillier, Randy	Munro, Julia	Yakabuski, John
Jackson, Rod	Nicholls, Rick	Yurek, Jeff
Jones, Sylvia	O'Toole, John	

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller):
 The ayes are 62; the nays are 32.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): I declare the main motion carried.

Motion agreed to.

PROSPEROUS AND FAIR ONTARIO ACT (BUDGET MEASURES), 2013

LOI DE 2013 POUR UN ONTARIO PROSPÈRE ET ÉQUITABLE (MESURES BUDGÉTAIRES)

Resuming the debate adjourned on May 16, 2013, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 65, An Act to implement Budget measures and to enact and amend various Acts / Projet de loi 65, Loi visant à mettre en œuvre les mesures budgétaires et à édicter et à modifier diverses lois.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Pursuant to the programming motion just passed, second reading moved on May 7, 2013, I am now required to put the question.

Division on second reading of Bill 65: Mr. Gerretsen has moved second reading of Bill 65, An Act to implement Budget measures and to enact and amend various Acts.

Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I heard a no.

All those in favour of the motion will say "aye."

All those opposed will please say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

This will be a five-minute bell. Call in the members.

The division bells rang from 1646 to 1651.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Members, take your seats.

All those in favour of the motion will please rise one at a time and be recorded by the Clerk.

Ayes

Albanese, Laura	DiNovo, Cheri	Meilleur, Madeleine
Armstrong, Teresa J.	Duguid, Brad	Milloy, John
Balkissoon, Bas	Fife, Catherine	Moridi, Reza
Bartolucci, Rick	Flynn, Kevin Daniel	Murray, Glen R.
Berardinetti, Lorenzo	Forster, Cindy	Naqvi, Yasir
Bisson, Gilles	Gerretsen, John	Natyshak, Taras
Bradley, James J.	Gélinas, France	Orazietti, David
Broten, Laurel C.	Horwath, Andrea	Piruzza, Teresa
Campbell, Sarah	Hoskins, Eric	Prue, Michael
Cansfield, Donna H.	Jaczek, Helena	Qaadi, Shafiq
Chan, Michael	Jeffrey, Linda	Sandals, Liz
Chiarelli, Bob	Kwinter, Monte	Schein, Jonah
Colle, Mike	Leal, Jeff	Sergio, Mario
Coteau, Michael	MacCharles, Tracy	Singh, Jagmeet
Crack, Grant	Mangat, Amrit	Sousa, Charles
Craitor, Kim	Mantha, Michael	Tabuns, Peter
Damerla, Dipika	Marchese, Rosario	Vanthof, John
Del Duca, Steven	Matthews, Deborah	Wong, Soo
Delaney, Bob	Mauro, Bill	Wynne, Kathleen O.
Dhillon, Vic	McMeekin, Ted	Zimmer, David
Dickson, Joe	McNeely, Phil	

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Those opposed, please stand and be counted one at a time by the Clerk.

Nays

Arnett, Ted	Jones, Sylvia	O'Toole, John
Bailey, Robert	Klees, Frank	Ouellette, Jerry J.
Barrett, Toby	Leone, Rob	Pettapiece, Randy
Chudleigh, Ted	MacLaren, Jack	Scott, Laurie
Clark, Steve	MacLeod, Lisa	Shurman, Peter
Dunlop, Garfield	McDonell, Jim	Smith, Todd
Elliott, Christine	McKenna, Jane	Thompson, Lisa M.
Hardeman, Ernie	McNaughton, Monte	Walker, Bill
Hillier, Randy	Milligan, Rob E.	Wilson, Jim
Hudak, Tim	Munro, Julia	Yakabuski, John
Jackson, Rod	Nicholls, Rick	Yurek, Jeff

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller):
 The ayes are 62; the nays are 33.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): I declare the motion carried.

Second reading agreed to.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): This bill is therefore referred to the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs.

EMPLOYMENT STANDARDS AMENDMENT ACT (LEAVES TO HELP FAMILIES), 2013

LOI DE 2013 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LES NORMES D'EMPLOI (CONGÉS POUR AIDER LES FAMILLES)

Resuming the debate adjourned on March 18, 2013, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 21, An Act to amend the Employment Standards Act, 2000 in respect of family caregiver, critically ill

child care and crime-related child death or disappearance leaves of absence / Projet de loi 21, Loi modifiant la Loi de 2000 sur les normes d'emploi en ce qui concerne le congé familial pour les aidants naturels, le congé pour soins à un enfant gravement malade et le congé en cas de décès ou de disparition d'un enfant dans des circonstances criminelles.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Further debate? Mr. Singh has the floor.

Interjections.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Thank you, thank you. It's a great honour to receive such accolades from my colleagues. Please feel free to leave if you want to; I entertain that at this point. If you want to stay, though, I'll have some excellent comments for you to listen to.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Order. I remind the members that the House is in session.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: I assure you that I'll address the assembly with some novel ideas that you've never heard on this bill whatsoever in your life, so I do encourage you all to listen.

This bill: It makes a lot of sense that if someone is sick—the Minister of Labour had a great idea that if someone is sick, if someone is ill, then you should be able to take care of them. That seems very sensible, that seems very reasonable, and the fact that we allow an employee that opportunity to take a leave so they can take care of their loved one makes a lot of sense. But the inherent problem is this: If we don't provide any sort of funding, if we don't provide any sort of income replacement, if we don't provide any sort of mechanism so that the person who is taking that leave is able to support themselves or the person that they're taking care of, the bill lacks some substance.

Ms. Cindy Forster: Enforcement.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: The other issue, a great issue that my colleague the member from Welland brings up, is that if we have already a severe lack of supervision and enforcement on the part of the Ministry of Labour, how will this bill be enforced? What if an employee does take this leave, but the employer says, "You know what? You've taken this leave, you left me without an employee, and I'm going to fill that position with another person," and you go back to get that same job and you don't have it anymore? What protection do you have if the enforcement is already so weak in the Ministry of Labour? What guarantee do you have that you'll actually get back to that job, and how can we effectively and practically ensure that different companies are actually following through with this legislation?

It calls to mind the big question of enforcement. The law is only as meaningful and as powerful and as practical as the enforcement, as its implementation, as the resources that are available so that it will follow through and you will actually get that leave.

So there are two issues so far that we've covered. One is that without any funding associated with this bill, people don't have any real means to support themselves

if they take this leave and they are no longer working, and secondly, without enforcement, without the ability to ensure that the Ministry of Labour actually gets out to different companies, different employers, to ensure that people who are using this law and who are taking advantage of this leave are not actually punished or subsequently dismissed from their employment.

The other issue that has been raised in this House, and I support this issue, is the concept of the time period or the duration. There are circumstances where people don't need an extended period; they don't need to take off months. They need to take off every Monday to help someone go to a dialysis appointment or they need to take off every Friday afternoon to ensure that someone can make it to their cancer treatment. The way that the leave is framed doesn't allow the flexibility to let people take leave in a meaningful way. Sometimes you don't need to take weeks and weeks off; you just need, throughout a week, a scheduled time where you can leave to be able to provide that care. This bill does not provide for that specific circumstance where you don't need an extended period of time but you need an interval-basis leave where you can leave at selected periods throughout a week or throughout a day to be able to provide care.

But broader than just the idea of allowing employees, working people, the opportunity to take time off to take care of their loved ones, it calls to mind our overall approach to the way we take care of our injured and members of our community who are ill or who are facing some serious injuries or illnesses.

1700

It also draws to mind something that the member from Parkdale—High Park brought up: the approach taken in some Scandinavian countries where the governments in those countries actually pay family members to provide care for their own family members who either have developmental issues or have other illnesses or other impairments. You can actually provide funding to the family member so that if someone actually wants to stay home and take care of an ill or unwell person, if there was funding that the government provided to a family member, that would be a strategic and innovative way to provide direct care by someone—a loved one—who wants to provide that care, but also provide them with a means to earn a living.

That would be a very progressive, forward-thinking way of delivering care, and delivering care in a way that breaks some of the models we think of when we think of care. This would be something that I hope we can look at.

When we're talking about this type of employee leave, we should start thinking about these other models of care, these other ways that we can deliver good, quality services to our community, to our loved ones, in a way that breaks from the traditional models of thinking that can actually work as a way that often when we think of investments in our community, we think that they're costs. Often when we change the model or you invest, you actually save in the long run.

One of the best examples I can think of is the idea of home care. Home care investment, putting in investments

in terms of allowing people to stay in their home, to be taken care of in their home, could actually prevent people from being admitted into long-term-care facilities, which are far more costly.

This is an opportunity for us to open the discussion around if we're requiring employers to allow employees to have a leave, that while they're taking that time to provide care for their loved ones, let's look at that idea of home care, that idea of investing in people, putting in that care for loved ones in their home, delivering in a manner that's direct—without any administrative costs, without any bureaucratic costs—direct delivery of services that provides an investment in someone's health that could save costs in the long run.

All too often we don't realize the savings we could enjoy if we make a little bit of an investment. While home care is one example, allowing family members who are caring for their loved ones and taking a leave from their employment, perhaps looking at funding them, providing them with government funds, is a more effective way of delivering health care than our over-reliance on the hospital system. There are many examples that if we shift the way we deliver our care, that we could save money and provide better care.

Just touching on hospitals broadly, that model of care, if we don't give an employee the opportunity to take that time off from their work so that they can take care of a loved one—a child who's ill or a family member, like a mother or father—that person might get even more ill and then have to receive acute care from a hospital, and that cost is far more than a little investment up front.

It also opens up the discussion and allows us to talk about the idea of investing in more health promotion. If we had invested in greater health promotion—many of the illnesses that people face and have to take time off to care for their loved one are preventable. One of the most preventable illnesses, which is one of the highest costs to our society, is diabetes. Diabetes is one of those things we can directly address. We can reduce the incidence of diabetes by two very straightforward things: proper nutrition and exercise. If we made an investment into our society, into our communities, by providing opportunities for exercise, by providing opportunities for better nutrition, making food that is good for you more affordable and making food that's good for you the easier option—and one of the slogans that I strongly support is that if you make the healthy choice the easier choice, people will make that choice. It's very straightforward.

I think it needs to be repeated: If you make the healthy choice the easier choice, people will make that choice. They will choose to be healthy. But if all the opportunities for exercise and all the opportunities to eat well are difficult or hard—there are barriers to it, there are economic barriers to it—people won't do it. You have to tie in a broader picture, a broader notion, of health care to address some of these issues. If you look at it in a myopic, narrow frame, we're not going to come up with solutions that will work in this time and age.

There is fiscal restraint that people are talking about, but I oppose that; I resist that idea. We can invest to save

money as opposed to tightening our belts to save money—that's a tired model. Obviously, in certain circumstances, we have to look at reducing our costs. But a far more powerful way of saving in the long run and creating a sustainable society is investing in our society, investing in our people. One way to do that would be to invest in health promotion to prevent these illnesses so that family members wouldn't have to take time off from work to care for loved ones; we could prevent it in the first place.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Ms. Soo Wong: I'm pleased to be given an opportunity to speak following my colleague from Bramalea-Gore-Malton. I think some of the comments he made are quite appropriate when we go to committee with this particular bill. Some of the suggestions he had dealing with a flexible timeline—I certainly recognize as a registered nurse the times when a family member needs to take time off for appointments and to follow up with the tests and what have you.

The other piece that the member made some suggestions on is the approaches in dealing with a sick loved one. I think the concern I would have is his comment about how to fund this type of caregiver leave. I think the question has to be asked: which section and the cost associated with this kind of caregiver leave. But I think that the member from Bramalea-Gore-Malton has some very, very good suggestions. I think it's valid for us to take this to committee and have further conversations, and then to have further discussions with the community.

I think the key piece here, for this proposed legislation from the Minister of Labour, is the fact that we as a government recognize that family members who have loved ones who are ill or in critical care or missing—a missing child or a crime-related child death—should be given an opportunity and provided leave, and be compassionate about this kind of incident. The proposed legislation, if passed, would support families across Ontario, and ensure they will not lose their job while looking after their loved one during a time of distress and during a critical time.

I know that this particular bill has been debated for many, many hours. It is my hope that we can expedite this and go to committee.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Mr. Jerry J. Ouellette: I appreciate the opportunity to comment on the member from Bramalea-Gore-Malton's statement on Bill 21.

Yes, of course, it certainly would be very difficult in the enforcement of the bill, and how that's going to play out and what is going to take place with the Ministry of Labour—how they're going to be able to determine with the employers as to how it does or does not take place. I agree with that.

Some of the other areas, though. The flexibility of time: We're not quite sure why it is basically mandated for the time frame that's listed there. Quite frankly, it

could be for compensation reasons in order to try to have the federal government come into play in order to be a participant in this—as opposed to what I agree with the member from Bramalea—Gore—Malton could be if somebody only needs half a day off to take someone for a particular case or for dialysis, as he mentioned.

I know that my own mother, for example, when she was taking care of her sister, would have had to take an entire week off in order to take her to the hospital. It was a rather sad case, where she had an epidural put in for a knee replacement and was paralyzed. As a result, she now has to go on a regular basis. So she helps out there.

The issue about paying to provide care: I'm not so sure that I effectively agree with the member in that perspective. I mean, individuals are going to pay family members to take care of their own family members. Are they the same qualified individuals? Do they have the experience? Are they physiotherapists who are out there? Are they trained in specific areas to look at that? It's an area that would require a lot of research and a lot more detail. It was interesting that the member brought it up, but I'm not so sure that I would be supportive of it. I'd have to do further research into it.

I would hope the member does realize that in the case of those receiving military benefits, there is availability now that some of those benefits are paid by the government of Canada—they have individuals who can take care of their own family members within their own home. But that's a limited amount of funds.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Welland.

1710

Ms. Cindy Forster: I want to thank the member from Bramalea—Gore—Malton for his comments on this family leave bill. Now, I think the biggest concerns we had when this was introduced before prorogation, the last time, was the fact that it was a block of time that you had to take. Clearly, the government listened and changed that block of eight weeks into individual one-week blocks, but that in itself won't address those people who find themselves in precarious work.

We all recently received a report from the Ontario Federation of Labour, I believe, and McMaster University about all of the people working in precarious employment, who probably couldn't afford to take a day off, let alone take a week off, so I think this legislation needs to be amended to allow for shorter periods of time for people to do it. It may also be a situation where there are a number of family members who want to share that care and be able to share that period of time off.

The other problem is enforcement. We know that the Employment Standards Act already has a lot of areas where enforcement is a huge issue. We hear from people every day who don't have enforcement around their vacation pay, their unpaid wages, their severance issues. This is an issue where it's going to need some enforcement, because, as I said, there are these people who may be afraid to take a day off and perhaps lose their job. So

who's going to enforce it, and what is that enforcement going to look like, to ensure that people actually have the ability to use this legislation, if and when it's passed?

Those are my comments. Thanks for the opportunity.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments.

Ms. Helena Jaczek: It's a pleasure to rise and make a few comments in relation to the remarks from our colleague from Bramalea—Gore—Malton.

I think the fundamental issue here is that this is about compassion. I think we've all had constituents in our offices coming to tell us a sad story of looking after an individual in their family with a serious illness and the type of toll that it takes. Anything we can do to lighten that load is very important. The job-protected leave of absence of up to eight weeks is an important aspect. It was very interesting to listen to our colleague from Welland, with a number of good ideas related to how that might be operationalized to really address the needs of individuals. Certainly, dividing the time up makes sense.

I was really pleased to see the kind of endorsement that we've received for this Employment Standards Amendment Act. Societies and associations that we all respect a great deal are very supportive. They are societies that relate to chronic illness. We have the Multiple Sclerosis Society, the Parkinson Society, the Alzheimer Society and the Canadian Cancer Society, all dealing with very difficult, chronic conditions that take a great deal of care for the individuals and such a toll on the family caregiver.

I'm enthusiastic about ensuring that this gets to committee in a timely fashion so that we can have more of a type of discussion that will result in what I anticipate is an excellent bill.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member for Bramalea—Gore—Malton has two minutes.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: I'd like to thank all of the participants in this debate: the member from Scarborough—Agincourt, the member from Oshawa, my colleague the member from Welland, and also my colleague from the public accounts committee, the member from Oak Ridges—Markham.

At its core, this is the type of bill that, in terms of its benefit to people, there is certainly a benefit. We can accept that. There are some additions and some amendments that could be brought that would make this bill better, and we will do our best to bring those amendments forward, particularly when it comes to flexibility. The reality is that people may not need a week at a time. This issue has come up again and again; I think there's a bit of a consensus on this, that the circumstances around people's employment—having the flexibility to take time off is something that we need to include.

My colleague from Welland brings up a very important point. There was a report released by McMaster and the United Way, and it talked about the nature of employment. The reality is that precarious employment is such a common phenomenon that the study found that about 50% of people in the workforce are in a precarious

type of employment. Not all those are temporary employment, like temporary employment agencies; some of those are contract work. But that's a serious phenomenon.

Given that circumstance—people with precarious employment—what would be the impact if someone who has precarious employment wants to take time off to care for their loved one? There has to be some additional protection for folks in those circumstances. That's a reality that people are facing.

We know that precarious employment is linked to poverty. It's linked to your success in society. So we need to ensure that there's greater protection for folks like that, broadly, in terms of doing away with precarious employment and moving toward full-time employment, but particularly, in this circumstance, that employees who want to take leave should have greater protection.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Further debate?

Ms. Soo Wong: I'm pleased to be given an opportunity to speak about Bill 21. The proposed legislation focuses on amendments to employment standards and on several sections of the Employment Standards Act.

First, the bill talks about amending section 49.3, dealing with family caregiver leave. In this particular section, it talks about how the "employee is entitled to a leave of absence without pay to provide care or support to a family member who has a serious medical condition."

Second, the bill also talks about amending section 49.4 of the Employment Standards Act that deals with critically ill child care leave. An employee "employed by his or her employer for at least six consecutive months is entitled to a leave of absence without pay of up to 37 weeks to provide care or support to a critically ill child."

Third, the bill, if passed, will amend section 49.5 of the Employment Standards Act. This particular section allows an employee who is employed by his or her employer for six consecutive months a leave without pay if his or her child "dies or disappears and it is probable, considering the circumstances, that the child died or disappeared as a result of a crime."

Last, it also will amend section 52.1 of the Employment Standards Act that's related to the leaves to be taken in its entirety as is related to the act.

Mr. Speaker, the proposed Bill 21 is really about compassion. If the bill is passed, it recognizes the importance of families and job security for each employee in the province of Ontario, that they will be given an opportunity to take a leave when there is a family member who is critically ill, or a child who has been murdered, missing or deceased.

The government, through the Minister of Labour, has brought this before the House. Why do we need this particular bill? There are several reasons why we need this bill. Let me go through them with you. First, the legislation, if passed, is giving working Ontarians the one thing they need the most when it comes to caring for seriously ill or injured family members—I know every

member of this House has that kind of experience; we will get a call from our constituency office or our own personal experiences where we have to take time off from work.

The other piece here is, during a time of crisis it is best for family members to look after their loved ones instead of worrying about their jobs and the security of their job. So the proposed legislation, if passed, would give hard-working Ontarians unpaid, job-protected time away from work to care for their loved ones. This is very, very important, Mr. Speaker.

The other piece is, every employee in Ontario, whether they work full-time, part-time, permanent or on contract, would be covered and protected by this legislation if they are eligible. They will be protected, Mr. Speaker.

The other piece is, I know that when we brought this particular legislation to the House last round there were some concerns raised about potential abuses of the legislation. Let me share with the members of the House about this concern. The proposed legislation, if passed, has a number of provisions to reduce the potential for abuse by employees.

First, the leave would be unpaid, so it's not like they will be paid, notwithstanding the possible entitlement to EI benefits, which would likely prevent employees from taking or prolonging a leave when it is not necessary.

1720

Second is the requirement for a medical certificate issued by a qualified health professional stating that the child is critically ill and requires care or support by one or more parents and setting out a period of time which a child requires the care or support.

Third, the bill also requires the employees to notify the employer in writing that they would be taking care of a critically ill child—care leave—including a written plan setting out the specific time when they will be taking the leave.

Fourth, the proposed bill will also talk about the period of time that they will be on leave.

Fifth, the bill will apply to an employee who is a parent of a critically ill child under the age of 18.

Finally, the also bill reflects the fact that the federal government right now has passed a bill similar to ours, if we pass our bill; about 6,000 federal employees across Canada will benefit from recent changes to the Employment Insurance Act. Only a relatively small portion are entitled to this kind of benefit.

The proposed legislation is good for everybody, not just an employee, but also an employer. We also have heard from the various stakeholders in consultation supporting the bill. When this was first brought to the House in January, 2012, to then-Minister Jeffrey, the Canadian Manufacturers and Exporters, the CME, wrote in support of the bill. I'm going to share those comments with the House: that the government needs to consider economic impact of the legislation in consulting with the industry, but that they also support the intent of the bill.

The Alzheimer Society of Ontario applauded the government for introducing the bill, saying that if passed,

it would be a welcome solution to many of the caregivers and families living with Alzheimer's disease and other forms of dementia. Our colleague from Etobicoke had brought in a proposed motion about Alzheimer's, because that is the fastest-growing seniors-related illness in Ontario. The aging population with dementia and Alzheimer's—we know we have constituents like that in our community and maybe even family members with this particular illness.

The Ontario Home Care Association also supports the bill. They support families as they fulfil their caregiving responsibilities. The OHCA stated that the bill demonstrated government's awareness of the challenges many families are going through.

The other piece is that we also received comments and support of the bill from the Canadian Federation of Independent Business. They said that the proposed legislation is good for employees, but also that employees may not be able to afford to take time off and businesses may need to find out times to support those employees.

Another organization, the Bayshore Home Health organization, said that the eight-week family caregiver leaves would give Ontarians time to care for family members suffering from serious illness. Bayshore Home Health also cited the family caregiver leave as an inspiration for their Facebook challenge calling for funding to establish a paid leave for workers who are providing for elderly relatives.

The proposed legislation by the Minister of Labour clearly has some support. Yes, I did hear earlier my colleague from Bramalea—Gore—Malton make some suggestions about improvement of the bill, and that is the right thing to do when we go to committee in terms of this legislation.

The other thing: If the legislation is passed it will provide—a key component of the bill is job protection for the caregiver, to provide protection for the caregiver who is an employee, to care for their spouse; a parent, a step-parent, a foster parent of the employee or the employee's spouse; a child, step-child or foster child to the employee or employee's spouse; grandparents, step-grandparents, grandchild or step-grandchild of the employee or the employee's spouse; the spouse of a child of an employee; the employee's brother or sister; or relatives of the employee who is a dependent of the employees for their care or assistance. The proposed legislation is very prescriptive in terms of who is eligible to be under this caregiver leave.

The other piece of this legislation also supports the government's focus on ensuring patients in the health care system get the right care at the right time at the right place. It also ensures family members to be eligible to provide direct support to an ill relative—a vital component part. It also means that the home is being supported by the employees at the right time.

Often, in our business as members of provincial Parliament, we hear stories where a family member has to look after a loved one discharged from a home and

who wants to die at home. I know, as a nurse, many of my patients want to die at home. Through this proposed legislation, if passed, the family member will be given an opportunity to look after their loved one at home and also to support their family members in a time of crisis, Mr. Speaker. It will provide not just emotional support, but also by freeing up health care beds, it will shorten the wait times in the hospitals as well as the emergency rooms.

The proposed legislation also builds on the existing family medical leave, which is a leave to provide care or support to certain individuals if the individual has a serious medical condition with significant risk of death occurring within a period of 26 months.

I know my colleagues across both parties will be supportive of this bill. There may be some fine-tuning, Mr. Speaker, and that is the right thing to do. At the end of the day, all of us in this Legislature have a purpose in this House: making sure that we provide the lead in our discussions in terms of legislation, but also reaching out to support families across Ontario.

I'm going to share an experience with the members of the House. Shortly after this legislation was first introduced in 2012, Mr. Speaker, the same morning that I was speaking in support of the bill by Minister Jeffrey—that morning, I had to leave the House immediately after my presentation because my own sister-in-law was fighting for her life, and I had to take time off from the Legislature to be with her, and with my brother, because she was in critical care. I know every member of this House has had those personal experiences—for me, both as a sister-in-law and also as a registered nurse. We know family members need time off, and when there is time off available to them and their job is protected, there is an opportunity.

The other piece, Mr. Speaker, about this legislation that is very, very important is the fact that the employee is given a specific time, a duration of the leave. For example, with respect to the crime-related child death or disappearance, the employee would be able to take a leave up to 104 weeks with respect to the death of a child, and up to 52 weeks with respect to the disappearance of a child. An employee would not be entitled to a leave of absence if the employee is charged with the crime or it is probable, considering the circumstances, that the child was a party to the crime. So there are boundaries or parameters about this particular bill to prevent potential abuse and also to address those concerns that have been raised in the previous introduction of the bill.

The other piece here is, what is the impact of this bill in terms of the employees and employers? If the bill is passed, all employees covered by the Employment Standards Act would be eligible for the leaves. This includes full-time employees, part-time employees and employees on fixed-term contracts, because we know that across the province there are many employees who are on contract. The Employment Standards Act does not apply to some workers, like religious, judicial or elected office-holders and a few other categories of workers.

However, only employees who have been employed by their employer for at least six consecutive months would be entitled to the proposed critically ill child care leave and the proposed crime-related child death or disappearance leave. This will mirror the federal legislation in terms of leaves as has been passed.

The other piece here is, what will be exempted from the legislation? All employees covered by the ESA would be eligible for leave, but the ESA does not apply to some workers, like police officers, clergy and judicial office-holders.

The other piece about this particular leave: There are seven types of leaves of absence under the Employment Standards Act, so I'm going to share with the House about this piece, Mr. Speaker. We currently have pregnancy leave, up to 17 weeks.

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We also have parental leave up to 35 weeks right now for a birth mother or up to 37 weeks for all other new parents. There's already, currently, family medical leave up to eight weeks. We also have organ donor leave up to 13 weeks, with the possibility of an extension, in some cases, for an additional period of up to 13 weeks. There's also personal emergency leave up to 10 days. There's also declared emergency leave for as long as a provincial emergency is declared under the Emergency Management and Civil Protection Act. Last but not least, Mr. Speaker, there's a reservist leave for the time an employee is deployed by Canadian Forces operations. Currently in Ontario, we already have a variety of leaves, so the proposed legislation is specifically targeted to family caregivers, to support them when they look after their loved ones during critical times.

The other piece here is, what are some of the differences between the personal emergency leave versus the family medical leave? That's often been asked of me when I return to the constituency office. Here are some of the differences: The personal emergency leave provides short-term, unpaid job protection up to 10 days per calendar year for a broad list of personal and family emergencies and illnesses, as well as bereavement. Only employees whose employer regularly employs 50 or more employees are eligible to take the personal emergency leave. The family medical leave provides a longer time period of unpaid job protection, and this is only up to eight weeks, only in cases where a family member has a serious medical condition with a significant risk of death within a period of 26 weeks. Employees taking a family medical leave may be eligible for federal employment insurance, EI, for compassionate care benefits. The other difference, in terms of the proposed family caregiver leave, is it's only up to eight weeks of unpaid job protection leave for employees who care for a family member with a serious medical condition that requires their care or support, even if there's no risk for imminent death.

The proposed list of eligible family members—I spoke about that earlier, but I want to reiterate the fact that the proposed family caregiver leaves mirror the personal

emergency leave and also include the ability to prescribe other individuals by the regulations. Under the family medical leave, the list is broadened to include other family members, such as family members or neighbours or friends.

The proposed critically ill care leave will provide unpaid, job-protected leave of up to 37 weeks within a 52-week period when an employee wants to provide support or care of a critically ill child who is under the age of 18. Having spent some time working for the Hospital for Sick Children, I can tell you that many of the parents and extended family members will look upon this particular section of the legislation to provide that care. I don't know of anybody who has spent time working with a sick child or a critically ill child who would not support this particular bill. Many members of this House either know somebody or have worked with somebody who has a child or a neighbour with a child who has been sick. This particular section of the legislation will provide the compassion, provide the care, but most importantly, it will provide some protection. There's nothing worse than when you're caring for a loved sick child, at home or in the hospital—that they have to worry about their jobs and they have to worry about the survival of the family. The proposed legislation will ensure the family member is given that protection.

The other piece of the proposed legislation talks about a crime-related child death or disappearance. This is the worst thing that can happen to a family member, when a child is killed or there is an unfortunate death or disappearance. The proposed legislation, if passed, will provide some compassion, but more importantly, job protection, which is much needed for employees who have a child in this unforeseen death or disappearance.

Mr. Speaker, there are many, many reasons why this bill needs to be passed, but more importantly, we need to look upon my colleagues opposite to move this legislation forward, to go to committee, so that it can be fine-tuned, and then it can be supported and be passed into legislation by the end of this year, so that every Ontario family will be supported and cared for.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Before I move on to questions and comments, I beg to inform the House that I have today laid upon the table the 2012-13 annual report of the Integrity Commissioner of Ontario.

Questions and comments?

Mr. John O'Toole: The member from Scarborough-Agincourt is a nurse, and she mentioned the key operative words here, "compassion" and "consensus." It's very appropriate that we've had a couple of votes here today on the budget, which would not be compassion so much as coalition—coalition with the NDP government.

I guess my sense is that I'd be happier if a good friend of mine, Leanne Chan, was here because she has a very good grasp of the budget measures and things like that.

But there was a phrase used that I thought was quite an overworked phrase, really. It's "the right care at the right time in the right place." It's in the context of the physiotherapists here yesterday—so outraged about the

carpet pulled out from under seniors in Ontario. It's that lack of compassion that is demonstrated here daily.

So with all due respect for Ms. Wong, I would say that I find the three substantive recommendations in here quite acceptable, and I will hopefully get some time to speak on this bill. I'd like to have an hour, but I could probably do it in 20 minutes.

The point here really is this: There isn't one cent of government money in this—not one nickel of government money. What they're doing is downloading on employers and small business. If I was an employer with, say, five or 10 employees, I'm mandated now to find a replacement employee and give the person the time off, which is appropriate. Most well-intended employers would do that, but there should be some measures so that the small family business could accommodate this change. But no, Premier Wynne is going to be benevolent, giving everything away.

I have more to say on this lack of accountability by the government. We had questions here today on this very topic of the Premier unwilling to recognize that the privacy commissioner said she committed a crime. Basically, that's what—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Thanks. Questions and comments?

Mr. John Vanthof: Once again, it's an honour to speak on behalf of the residents of Timiskaming—Cochrane on this issue, Bill 21, the family caregiver leave act. My colleagues here gave me a good line. They said you can't legislate compassion. You either have compassion or you don't. This is the kind of bill that can do some good things for some people, but to use the compassion card especially—it's not often I agree with the member from Durham, but I will give him this one—when you're removing physiotherapy services from a lot of seniors, that's a bit of a stretch.

This is the type of bill that can make a difference to some people. It's the type of bill that can make a lot of difference to some people. It makes it a relevant—not irrelevant—a relevant thing to talk about, and I think we can make some improvements, specifically that it has to be a week's duration every time you take the leave. That would work for some people, but as already has already been said in this House, there are a lot of cases where it could make a much bigger impact if the durations were shorter. Some people need to help a seriously ill family member for one day a week, for a longer period, and it would make a big difference to both the person who's receiving the care and the person who's giving the care. It would make as big a difference as if they took a week. I think that's something we really have to concentrate on.

There are other things that we could make better in this act. The one thing we have to really keep in mind is there are people who—although this act makes sense on paper, if they're not aware of it or if the employer doesn't follow it, it won't help them at all, and that's something we really have to be cognizant of.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Hon. Glen R. Murray: I have to confess that I have a particular fondness for newer members of this House who are serving in their first term. I generally find them—not all but—

Mr. John Yakabuski: What's wrong with the guys who are in their third term?

Hon. Glen R. Murray: Because there are cranky people sometimes who interrupt you, Mr. Speaker, as opposed to those like the member for Scarborough—Agincourt, who really brings some refreshing ideas and is very positive, and I want to commend her.

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The member for Welland, I thought, gave one of the most intelligent two-minute speeches I've heard. She really looked at the legislation, understood how we could improve it, and constructively put some positive ideas. I endorse them. I agree with the critique; I think it's a positive critique.

When we're having a healthy debate here, we can debate things like, you can't legislate compassion, as my friend from Timiskaming—Cochrane points out. But you can have uncompassionate and indifferent laws. This is a law that creates conditions for compassion.

I fundamentally disagree with some of the folks who say things—and as my friend David Crombie always says, everything is connected to everything else. I have 50,000 seniors, many of them in my constituency—mostly older women—who are now going to get real physiotherapy, who couldn't do it. I'm sorry; I've gone to all of the seniors' homes and the retirement homes, and I've talked to it—and every Friday, these elderly women, who are now going to get that kind of service. We have four large companies that almost have an oligarchy, that are for-profit. I would ask the members in the third party, before they come to a conclusion, to look very carefully at the corporate spin you're being spun, because if you look carefully at it, we are going to actually have tens of thousands more folks who are going to get real physiotherapy.

These are all things that I think are consistent with compassion. Even though you can't legislate it, you can certainly endorse and support it in law.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Mr. Jim McDonell: I'm happy to rise on this bill as it really speaks to somebody I know at home, a friend of mine whose daughter is very sick. She has cancer, and the outlook is somewhat questionable. As a single mother trying to make ends meet, and through being forced to stay at home and look after her daughter, she has lost her employment.

I can see that sometimes bills like this are very much in demand. You have to look after people who are struggling and trying to look for programs that would help out over this time period.

We see in this government—they talk the story, but there's really nothing there.

A simple act would be to put somebody in a home and walk away, but that's not the country or family way. But

it means losing a job. It's very unfortunate. I think it just speaks to how badly this legislation is required. It's something that hits home for people who have really hit the wall, have tried all the medical services they can get. There is certainly a limit.

We hear about the budget, talking today, and we hear a government that has, I think, lost its way. Today the privacy commissioner was talking about the destruction of records. The messages I hear every day—people ask me what I think of this House, and it surprises me when you know the details behind something but you just don't hear a government perhaps say what I would think the truth is.

I think that sometimes you have to do the right thing. This is one bill that we're looking forward to, but there are many opportunities where we see the right thing not being done.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Scarborough—Agincourt has two minutes.

Ms. Soo Wong: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to hear the comments and feedback from my colleagues from Durham and Timiskaming—Cochrane, the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure, and my colleague from Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry.

I think the comments that were shared by my colleague from Timiskaming—Cochrane about compassion were really powerful words. Yes, you cannot legislate compassion, but our responsibility as members of this House is to create the environment that will encourage compassion. It's creating the environment.

I was very pleased to hear the comments from my colleague from Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry about his constituent losing her job to look after her loved one at home—because this is what this proposed legislation will do.

The comments from my colleague concerned about the PTs and what have you: Mr. Speaker, this bill is more than just about the change of physiotherapy services out there. This bill is to ensure that every Ontarian who is a full-time, part-time or contract employee is protected and given an opportunity to look after a loved one who is ill—who has a critically ill child, or someone whose child has been murdered or has disappeared. This is what the bill does.

I'm looking forward to when this bill goes to committee and we can improve it, like the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation said. Some of the comments made—my colleague from Welland had some really good suggestions. When it goes to committee, it will have an opportunity to improve.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Further debate?

Mr. John O'Toole: With all respect, I do want to make it very clear that our leader, Tim Hudak, and the PC caucus support the bill. We support the bill to the extent that it should go to committee hearings. As such, compassion is not something unique to any party here. Let's make that very clear. I believe each of us in this room is in support of helping those in our society, in our

communities. That should be very clear. Let's not have any portraying that some party is more benevolent.

What is contradictory to that argument is, if you're really being considerate of those around you, you shouldn't be spending their money so carelessly. A billion-dollar waste in saving five Liberal seats is unacceptable in Ontario. Today, holding information from the privacy commissioner is unacceptable; some call it criminal. So let's put it in context here—

Interjections.

Mr. John O'Toole: They broke the law.

Now, I do want to keep the tone down because there's been a lot of co-operation today, especially between the NDP and the Liberal Party. We're standing up for the most vulnerable in society, the people who can no longer afford their energy bills, their tax bills. I will stick to the topic, though.

It's important to put in context the purpose of the bill. I want to repeat—some of what I might say is redundant because it's been said—we are in support of the bill. It should go to committee.

Let's put the frame around it. Let's get the proper understanding. For the people of Ontario, this bill is actually showing some respect for the work done by Stephen Harper. This bill is actually a copy. It's implicated by the federal employment insurance benefits already in place. In fairness, I believe that was the right move that Stephen Harper and his government put in place. I think, respectfully, the government under—I think it came under Kathleen Wynne; no, no, it was before. This came up in—let me see here.

Interjection.

Mr. John O'Toole: No. Bill 21 was March 5, 2013. So it came under Premier Wynne; I concede that and I commend that. It's a feel-good, important bill, but this is important too: There's not one cent of provincial money in here, not for the bereaved family, not for the child in distress, not for the loss of a child. But what has happened recently—I think this thing has to all be put in a broader context. These are the articles in the paper; these are some political footnotes that I've got. Here's what it says right in the media this morning: It says the LCBO workers were handed a \$1,600 signing—

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): If the member from Timmins—James Bay could keep it down.

Mr. John O'Toole: This is an article—I didn't write this. It's the news; it's the truth. It says right here that Ontario gave its unionized LCBO workers \$1,600 each for signing—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Point of order from the member from Scarborough—Agincourt.

Ms. Soo Wong: The member is not speaking to Bill 21. I don't know how the LCBO has anything to do with Bill 21.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Thank you for your point of order. If I feel that the member goes too far drifting away from the bill, he'll be the first one to be notified by me.

And the member from Timmins–James Bay is making a lot of noise. He might want to go back in his own seat.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Not a problem, Speaker. I know when I'm insulted. I'm out of here.

Mr. John O'Toole: He may have to take a plane ride to Timmins or something.

Anyway, our deputy leader, Christine Elliott, said, “the Liberal government is prepared to go to any length to appease labour unions.”

Honestly, most of these things in a workplace environment are negotiated solutions. I want tabled the consultations that were held—and she made reference that the Canadian manufacturers' group had endorsed this. This is the important thing. The Canadian Federation of Independent Business, those groups—and I respect, if they have consulted with them, that they have done so.

1750

What is our biggest challenge in the province of Ontario? I put to the people of Ontario: It's jobs and the economy. All of this discussion is important; I get it. Where are we? We're on the wrong road; there's no question about that.

This bill is compassionate.

In fact, putting the bill in context for the viewers, the bill changes the Employment Standards Act. The bill is a page and a half long. It does some things—I'm going to put it down here, so that the people can have it in context.

Family caregiver leave is an unpaid job protection leave for up to eight weeks for each year, for an employee to provide care or support to a family member who has a serious medical condition. It could be a spouse, it could be a child. I agree 100% with the objective.

The next one is, critically ill child care leave is unpaid, job-protected leave for up to 37 weeks, for an employee to provide care or support for a child under 18—what if they're 19?—with a critical illness.

Third, crime-related child death or disappearance leave is unpaid, job-protected leave for up to 104 weeks, for an employee whose child has died where it was likely the result of a crime—I hope there isn't a big committee that has to decide whether it's a crime or not—and up to 52 weeks for an employee whose child has disappeared as a result of a crime.

That's where the amendment process—and why it should go to a committee.

So I have focused on the bill.

I have 20 minutes, so I may wander to a few more related issues. But each of these—an addition to family medical leave, which is important; that's under section 49.1 of the Employment Standards Act, and personal emergency leave, which is under section 50.

This is another modification. For instance, members of my own family—we'll just leave it at that, without making this a sad story about my life or a happy story. For a loved one—each week, I took them for chemotherapy. That was a Wednesday of each week for a number of weeks. The amendment that I would recommend in the most positive of terms is—why do they have to

take a week each time? It has to be taken in weeks. That's what it says in the bill.

Our leader, Tim Hudak, as well as Mr. Hillier, the critic—have made it very clear to us that we are supportive. This is the third time I've said that. But we have some ideas. In fact, we have some ideas to deal with the budget, too. We have some ideas, but they weren't listened to. Once again, we want this to go to committee. We're prepared to put these things on the table and add positive, productive, accountable solutions. This is how we tend to work.

I did work in personnel for about 10 years for a very large company. I've been away from that company for so long that they have run on hard times—perhaps because I left. No, I'm only kidding. We have to have a bit of humour in these times.

So that's one of the issues I would put on the table.

The largest statement about how we're doing—if you always put your finger in the water to see if the water is hot or cold—I like to put my finger on the pulse of the economy. How is it doing? Just touch the economy, listen to the people. How is it? Some 300,000 families don't even have a job, let alone get unpaid leave. This is a measurement of the economy, objectively done in the market that we're in.

When I looked at the context of the reporting on the LCBO, they were saying, “Warren ‘Smokey’ Thomas, president of the Ontario Public Service Employees Union (OPSEU), said that the employer dropped demands for significant concessions from staff”—so they not only gave them the 3% raise. Who can argue about that? What's the cost of living? This is the truth. You cannot increase spending faster than the increase in revenue. It doesn't work. In fact, Don Drummond said, in his very exhaustive report about the reform of the public sector, which I just happen to have a copy of—there are 360 recommendations. What he said in here, basically, is that there is a structural deficit.

Now, I believe that Ms. Wynne—pardon me, Premier Wynne—wants to do the right thing. And if she did, she'd stop spending these pages' future. Okay? Because right now, servicing the debt is the third-largest expenditure. It sounds rhetorical, it sounds like the same language—when I was chair of finance in Durham and I met with Floyd Laughren and Ed Philip at the time—it's the same deal. They have a structural deficit. Their debt on interest—if the interest rate goes up in Ontario, we're eunched.

Now, what's this got to do with Bill 21? We support Bill 21. There are three things that it does. We would like it to go to committee. We have three amendments already drafted. I'm discouraged when I think of the other things that we could be working on. We've voted on the very primary stages of the budget today, and there will be a committee to adopt some of the spending amendments—about \$1.2 billion—by the NDP government—or caucus. Well, it's a coalition government now. There's the left side of the ideology equation here, and then there's the right side. There's only one left and one right now; at least you got that sorted out.

Anyway, this is worth reading. This is mandatory reading for anybody in Ontario that really wants to know objectively—this is Don Drummond. This fellow was actually Paul Martin's deputy minister. He's a very bright guy. Paul Martin's the guy that balanced the budget federally; he downloaded everything to the provinces, is what he did.

Interjection: Yes, that helped.

Mr. John O'Toole: No, seriously, he did. He started “the cascading effect,” as they call it. He took the federal transfer payments to almost a 30% cut, and it happened in Bob Rae's time. Then Bob went and joined them. Look, if you follow the game here—not just the games that are going on here—

Interjection: It was going on back then, too, John.

Mr. John O'Toole: Yes. So I can only say this to you: that we support the bill—well, I've said that. So I don't want anybody in their two-minute hits suggesting for a moment that our leader, Tim Hudak—I think he has some wonderful ideas for Ontario. He has a plan for jobs. He has a plan for the economy. He has a plan for the future of Ontario. He has a plan for hope and prosperity.

But I did listen earlier to the member from Scarborough—Agincourt, and I—and I mean this quite genuinely and seriously—applaud her compassion. She does have a natural tone of compassion. You really do; as a nurse, I think that's part of your makeup and your personality. I do commend you for that and respect it, but I do hear different opinions on that. I'd say that on our side we're very compassionate.

You know what empowering people is? It's not giving them something. It's giving them pride in being something. Do you understand? This bill here—

Interjections.

Ms. Cindy Forster: Like physiotherapy from seniors?

Mr. John O'Toole: I don't even want to go down that road. I met with the physios yesterday, and in fact it was—

Interjections.

Mr. John O'Toole: The one comment—I'm trying to stay on track here and relate it to my constituents. A week ago tomorrow, a constituent of mine—I'll mention the name, Laurie Fowler—has been advocating through me to the Minister of Health, Minister Matthews, on behalf of her mother. Now, the advocacy was not for a

day off. The advocacy was to have an EAP—an exceptional access—for a drug referred to as Esbriet. Now, her mother—she's in her seventies; we'll leave it at that—this Ms. Fowler has impressed me with her compassion, and this is why I'm bringing it up. She is spending time today helping her mother, and it's those caregivers in Ontario that I most care about. When I think about it, those caregivers that are taking the spouse of the child to Sick Kids, the spouse of the child to receive chemotherapy, the spouse of the child for special treatment—this is where the pressure in society—in fact, that's part of what this whole thing with the physiotherapists is about: They're taking an entitlement away.

Ms. Wong should know that, because the treachery of this change in physiotherapy—

Interjection.

Mr. John O'Toole: Through Paul, what they're actually doing—

Interjections.

Mr. John O'Toole: Or through the Speaker; pardon me.

Ms. Cindy Forster: Brother Speaker.

Mr. John O'Toole: Brother Paul, Brother Speaker.

The whole thing they're doing is that they're taking the \$200 million out of the OHIP fund and they're moving it into the LHIN fund. This is a barrel with no bottom. You just keep pouring it in the top, and they say, “We haven't got any money left.” It's just tragic.

Now then, the shell game is just beginning. Then they've broken the \$200 million—less \$44 million—into three little pots, and you won't be able to find any of the pots shortly. How much is for the long-term care? Zero.

What's going to happen now—I think they should give taxi chits out to the seniors—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): I'd like to thank the member from Durham. We have now approached the magic hour of 6 o'clock—

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): And the member is finished. Thank you.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): This House stands adjourned until 9 o'clock tomorrow morning.

The House adjourned at 1800.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO
ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

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Albanese, Laura (LIB)	York South-Weston / York-Sud-Weston	
Armstrong, Teresa J. (NDP) Arnott, Ted (PC)	London-Fanshawe Wellington-Halton Hills	First Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Premier vice-président du comité plénier de l'Assemblée
Bailey, Robert (PC) Balkissoon, Bas (LIB)	Sarnia-Lambton Scarborough-Rouge River	Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Président du comité plénier de l'Assemblée Deputy Speaker / Vice-président
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Best, Margaret R. (LIB) Bisson, Gilles (NDP)	Scarborough-Guildwood Timmins-James Bay / Timmins-Baie James	House Leader, Recognized Party / Leader parlementaire de parti reconnu
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Broten, Hon. / L'hon. Laurel C. (LIB)	Etobicoke-Lakeshore	Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs / Ministre des Affaires intergouvernementales Minister Responsible for Women's Issues / Ministre déléguée à la Condition féminine
Campbell, Sarah (NDP) Cansfield, Donna H. (LIB) Chan, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (LIB)	Kenora-Rainy River Etobicoke Centre / Etobicoke-Centre Markham-Unionville	Minister of Tourism, Culture and Sport / Ministre du Tourisme, de la Culture et du Sport Minister Responsible for the 2015 Pan and Parapan American Games / Ministre responsable des Jeux panaméricains et parapanaméricains de 2015
Chiarelli, Hon. / L'hon. Bob (LIB)	Ottawa West-Nepean / Ottawa-Ouest-Nepean	Minister of Energy / Ministre de l'Énergie
Chudleigh, Ted (PC) Clark, Steve (PC)	Halton Leeds-Grenville	Deputy Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint de l'opposition officielle
Colle, Mike (LIB) Coteau, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (LIB)	Eglinton-Lawrence Don Valley East / Don Valley-Est	Minister of Citizenship and Immigration / Ministre des Affaires civiques et de l'Immigration
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Forster, Cindy (NDP)	Welland	Deputy House Leader, Recognized Party / Leader parlementaire adjointe de parti reconnu
Gélinas, France (NDP)	Nickel Belt	
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Hillier, Randy (PC)	Lanark-Frontenac-Lennox and Addington	
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Hoskins, Hon. / L'hon. Eric (LIB)	St. Paul's	Minister of Economic Development, Trade and Employment / Ministre du Développement économique, du Commerce et de l'Emploi
Hudak, Tim (PC)	Niagara West-Glanbrook / Niagara-Ouest-Glanbrook	Leader, Official Opposition / Chef de l'opposition officielle Leader, Progressive Conservative Party of Ontario / Chef du Parti progressiste-conservateur de l'Ontario
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Jaczek, Helena (LIB)	Oak Ridges-Markham	
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MacLeod, Lisa (PC)	Nepean-Carleton	
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Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
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Amrit Mangat, Michael Mantha
Jane McKenna
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No. 51



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**Legislative Assembly
of Ontario**

Second Session, 40th Parliament

**Official Report
of Debates
(Hansard)**

Thursday 6 June 2013

**Assemblée législative
de l'Ontario**

Deuxième session, 40^e législature

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

Jeudi 6 juin 2013



Speaker
Honourable Dave Levac

Clerk
Deborah Deller

Président
L'honorable Dave Levac

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Thursday 6 June 2013

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Jeudi 6 juin 2013

The House met at 0900.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Good morning. Please join me in prayer.

Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

STRONGER PROTECTION FOR ONTARIO CONSUMERS ACT, 2013

LOI DE 2013 RENFORÇANT LA PROTECTION DU CONSOMMATEUR ONTARIEN

Resuming the debate adjourned on June 5, 2013, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 55, An Act to amend the Collection Agencies Act, the Consumer Protection Act, 2002 and the Real Estate and Business Brokers Act, 2002 and to make consequential amendments to other Acts / Projet de loi 55, Loi modifiant la Loi sur les agences de recouvrement, la Loi de 2002 sur la protection du consommateur et la Loi de 2002 sur le courtage commercial et immobilier et apportant des modifications corrélatives à d'autres lois.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Further debate?

Mr. Michael Mantha: Good morning, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Eric, for always serving us so well with this wonderful Toronto water. Speaking about water—

Mr. Rick Bartolucci: Are you sure it's Toronto water?

Mr. Michael Mantha: Well, I hope so. We're down in Toronto.

Speaking about water, Mr. Speaker, I want to share this nice little story with you. Over the course of the weekend, as many of us in this House did, we went out to some of our Legion events for Decoration Day. I've had some misfortunes lately when it comes to certain personal incidents that have happened with my vehicle—anyway, I'll get into that.

I was on my way—I was leaving home after a Sunday morning with my family at home—and I go driving in to Mindemoya for a Legion event. On my way there, the water pump blew on my car. That wasn't the greatest thing. When I got to the event, I had a nice little chat with the people who were there, and as I was talking to them, I told them how I've made a great relationship lately with this fantastic woman. She is so great. She's been listening to every one of my prayers and listening to a lot of my comments.

As it turned out, this wonderful woman is Mother Nature. Mother Nature has helped me out, indeed, with a

couple of problems that I've had in Algoma-Manitoulin recently, and one of them is the high water levels in the northern part of my riding. I've asked her to lower those water levels in order to let traffic go through, in order for kids to go to school and in order for people to get to work. At the same time, I've asked her to indulge me by raising the water levels in the southern part of my riding of Algoma-Manitoulin, so that the Chi-Cheemaun can sail.

I have to say, she has been very receptive, so I'm very happy to have this nice Toronto water. But the one thing I didn't cover with her is the fact that we didn't deal with the water pump on my car. I'll have to talk to her a little more closely next time.

Interjection: Mother Nature doesn't cover Chevs.

Mr. Michael Mantha: Yes, Mother Nature doesn't cover Chevs.

Anyway, I stand here in my place and speak on behalf of people in Algoma-Manitoulin, and it is my pleasure to add my words to Bill 55. I'm going to try to cover all of it in the very limited time I have this morning.

I want to put a lot of emphasis, in my presentation this morning, in regard to schedule 2, along with schedule 1. They are the most predominant ones that really affect people in Algoma-Manitoulin—not to say that schedule 3 doesn't; it does as well. However, with the work my constituency staff and my Queen's Park staff deal with, those are the issues they hear the most throughout the riding and through the calls that we receive from individuals.

I have to say that I'm very fortunate to have some very good staff, as much as everybody else here at Queen's Park; I mentioned it yesterday. Something that we should all do once in a while is really speak to how we appreciate the work they do for us back home, because they are the faces of ourselves, and they do represent us very well and the work that they do is amazing work.

You know, this bill is good in many ways; however, it lacks in many others. It's a step in the right direction. However, that step can be much greater, and there's a lot more that we can do in order to assist with consumer protection. When you're looking at an individual who is struggling at times, and I have to say, some of these individuals—and I don't want to paint everybody with the same paintbrush. Some of these salespersons, when they come into our communities, they come in—it's their first job, and a new job for them. The problem is how they've been trained; it's how they've been instructed; it's how they've been told to target particular individuals, and when they do get to those doors, they have that uncanny

ability to pick up on certain signs: one of them, desperation; another one is seclusion. Another one is regarding—a lot of our seniors are being affected this way as well. That's where I have a lot of problems, in particular, with the lack of some of the efforts that have been put into this bill. Hopefully, once we get it to committee, we'll be able to strengthen it that much more so we can bring a lot of, as I would say, the meat and potatoes to this particular bill.

There are so many organizations out there, and I just want to try to focus a little bit, for this couple of minutes, on seniors. Seniors are very much excited about the access that we have to the Internet, and I'll tell you why: because it gives them the opportunity to communicate in a different way in talking to their kids. But in talking to their kids, it also gives them a different way of accessing information. It is through accessing that information that these individuals are being taken advantage of as well, and it doesn't speak to this in this bill.

There are many seniors out there that are frail, that are disabled, and there are programs out there that they can apply to in order to get the disability tax credit. It's a federal tax credit that you can apply for at the end of the year. However, there are organizations out there that actually prey on those seniors, and they prey on them to apply for their particular disability tax credit so they can fill out the forms for them. Well, if those seniors don't know that—that this is a very standardized form, that you just basically fill out your address, bring it in to your doctor and get it filled out and if you're eligible for that disability tax credit, you get it and then you can actually antedate it for the prior 10 years, depending on where you had your disability. You can stand to get a great amount of money in credit. But there are companies out there that are actually taking advantage of those seniors by getting them to sign on with them and saying, "Listen, we're going to promise to get you everything that you're rightfully entitled to. However, it's going to cost you" A, B and C. If seniors don't know about those programs, if there are communities that don't have the senior advocacy individuals to represent them in their communities, they're being taken advantage of.

There's also a situation—I'm a statistic of the forest industry and how it has been affected. There are a lot of individuals, personal friends of mine, who were very much taken advantage of by credit collectors and people who had promised them, "Listen, give us this large amount of money or give us two easy payments of \$200 or \$300, and at the end of your debt, we'll identify your debt and we'll be able to reduce it quite significantly." Well, when it sounds good, and if it is too good to be true, most times it is. That's what happened with these individuals: They have now been put into a position where they're in greater debt, have greater problems. That is totally unfair. These individuals, with all their hearts, are trying to provide for their families, but because of tough economic times, they have been taken advantage of. It is unfortunate that that is what's happening.

I don't want to paint the entire industry with the same paintbrush, but those are the facts. That's what's happening: These businesses or organizations are targeting particular areas that are struggling. Whether it's targeting communities that have high senior populations or targeting communities that are a one-industry town where they can come in and make promises of eliminating debt, it is happening, and we need to deal with that. I would like to see much stronger language in here with regard to dealing with that.

0910

Also, I had a personal situation with one of the hydro sellers. They came to the front door. My wife dealt with it. We were successful in getting out of our contract, but others aren't as fortunate. When you set your mind to getting something done, you do it.

I can't believe my time's already gone, Mr. Speaker. You just get so frustrated when you see individuals who are suffering and are being affected by others who are trying to take advantage of a particular situation. It is extremely frustrating for individuals.

Also, something that I touched on yesterday is that those individuals—once you are taken advantage of, once you sign on that dotted line, once you actually commit to these contracts, it's very difficult for people to get out of it. It's one thing dealing with the company that you're trying to get out of, but it's the embarrassment that you have to face your family or your kids, and you have to tell them that mom or dad—"I got caught up in this." Then you have the fights: "Why did you do that, Mom?" or "Why did you do that, Dad? You should have known better."

Well, you didn't, because these individuals are trained with the equipment. They come to your door, and they have stacks of papers and binders and statistics. They also come in: "Well, there's been a building code change your municipality is endorsing, and here's a letter from your community." It is very difficult for these seniors to say, "Oh, this is a bad idea," or, "Who do I call?" because by the time they walk to your door, they will not leave until you commit to signing that contract.

Those are the things that are actually happening day to day. We really need to deal with those situations, Mr. Speaker.

I firmly look forward to having the discussions that we're going to have on this over at committee. I hope that we can develop some type of—particularly toward our seniors—advocacy group and identify these groups within our communities to help them.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Questions and comments?

Hon. Mario Sergio: I've been listening to the member from Algoma-Manitoulin and his presentation on this particular piece of legislation. I have to say that I was very pleased to hear the comments, especially on two particular areas, two aspects, of the bill. He has mentioned that he needs to make it even stronger than what the bill represents at the moment, and also he talks very well with respect to seniors, which is a weak spot for me out there.

I have to compliment the Minister of Consumer Services for having the foresight and for bringing this bill quickly to the Legislature. I do hope that this bill can travel quickly to committee, where indeed we'll be receiving due consultation, and come back to this House as quickly as possible—I hope, stronger. I think our people need all the protection they can get, especially from abuse and schemes that, unfortunately, are out there.

If the bill will come back and go through, some of the major points include that the bill requires plain language and disclosure for consumer rights; prohibits delivery during the first 20 days, which is a cooling-off period; provides stronger consumer remedies when these rules are breached; and requires mandatory recorded verification of key terms of the contract.

They are all good recommendations, and I hope indeed that the bill will be receiving a good amount of consultation from the various individual organizations, agencies and stakeholders, and indeed come back to this House a better bill so we can offer better protection and more protection for our people.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Questions and comments?

Mr. John O'Toole: I enjoy listening to the member from Algoma-Manitoulin because he does put things in real terms and real life.

I'd recommend you get a General Motors car. They're actually very reliable, with great warranty programs. Don't bother spending any more money on the water pump. The car must be old enough as it is.

I think you also make a very good point on the bill. When I looked at the bill—and I did speak yesterday for a few moments—specifically under the debt settlement, some of it, quite honestly, has to go to committee. If you look at the bill itself, it actually provides that you can go to a payday house, and it gives you a 10-day cooling-off period. Well, you've already spent the money, and the reason you're there is that you have no money, so it's like trying to get blood from a stone.

I think there are some disclosure requirements there. Plain-language contracts are important for people who are under stress or pressure, so I commend you for giving voice to the people who aren't very, very able to take care of things like that.

Also, it says in that particular section—there are three sections, but that one there probably gets the most media attention generally, because they are preying, to some extent, on vulnerable people. To see one of these gaming casino places is absolutely criminal in terms of taking advantage of vulnerable people.

I think that the other part, too—it says in the bill that they have up to one year to cancel the contract; up to one year if they haven't received a copy of the contract. A lot of these people just run in, grab the money and right back to the casino or something. I don't know.

It's a feel-good bill. We would be supportive of it going to further hearings, to get to the root cause of some of these issues on these retailers, on home heaters and stuff like that. But I appreciate your comments this morning.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Questions and comments?

Mr. Jonah Schein: I'm pleased to join the debate on Bill 55. Welcome, guests, to the gallery; I'll explain to you, because you just got here, what we're talking about. This is a government-introduced bill; it's called Bill 55. It's the Stronger Protection for Ontario Consumers Act. The idea of the bill is to try to strengthen our rights as people who buy things, understanding that a lot of companies out there have a lot of resources to make a lot of fine print that's hard for most of us, when we're buying something, to understand that fine print. In that process, people are being ripped off.

So this is a good—the intention of this bill is good. I think we should send it to committee to debate more. I think it's a very limited bill in scope. I really appreciate the comments of my colleague from Algoma-Manitoulin. I know that the member formerly was a constituent worker and that he knows this stuff inside and out. In fact, his office, my office, all of our offices do a lot of this consumer advocacy from our office spaces, but there are only 107 of us across the province, and the fact is that there's far greater need for consumer advocacy. So one of the things we've proposed is actually having a designated consumer advocate, somebody who can stand up and help people.

I know that in my riding—my riding is called Davenport; it's a Toronto riding—we have a lot of people who have language barriers; a lot of people who are new to the country, people who are Spanish-speaking, Portuguese-speaking, Italian-speaking, Vietnamese-speaking. For those folks, the small print is even that much more difficult, and a consumer advocate that could help people in a language specific to their own language would be very, very helpful. That's something that I would suggest when we bring this bill forward into committee. Again, a small step; there's far more that we need to do but I'm glad that we're actually talking about this here today.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Questions and comments?

Hon. Jeff Leal: I'm glad I was here this morning to listen to the remarks from my colleague the member from Algoma-Manitoulin. About a week ago, I dropped by the Kawartha Dairy depot in Peterborough; it's on Lansdowne Street. It was very interesting; I looked at one of their shelves and it was full of agricultural products from Manitoulin Island, particularly great jams and marmalade. It was great to see that product and buy it that evening because I wanted to get an ice cream cone at Kawartha Dairy. But I just want to tell the member that great products from his riding are arriving in Peterborough. I certainly encourage my fellow citizens in Peterborough to acquire those great agricultural products from Manitoulin Island. They're very good.

I want to get back to Bill 55 here this morning. It's interesting, of course. Elliot Lake, in the member's riding, has become a seniors' community. It was once the hub of uranium mining in Ontario in the 1950s, 1960s, 1970s and 1980s, and then that came to pass. They recon-

figured Elliot Lake to become a retirement community where many people from around Canada, of course, arrive in Elliot Lake and take advantage of what is a very nice place to be.

So in that context of Bill 55, particularly seniors—and I previously talked about seniors, of course. These fast-talking people come to their doors. They've got a contract that's the greatest thing since sliced bread. "Sign on the dotted line; you get this water heater for next to nothing. It costs you nothing over 10, 15 years," and you know that's not the case. Of course, on those contracts, they have a 1-800 number; it says 1-800 number, call Timbuktu. You try to reach 1-800 Timbuktu; you never find anybody there, so you can't cancel this contract.

0920

The member is right. We've got to get this bill to committee. Obviously, there will be some amendments to it to make it a stronger bill, particularly for our seniors in Ontario who deserve this kind of protection.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member from Algoma-Manitoulin, you have two minutes for your response.

Mr. Michael Mantha: Mr. Speaker, it is going to be nice leaving here this morning, because everybody in this room is in agreement—something that doesn't happen enough. It's going to be so nice to bring that back home and say, "We accomplished something today. We're going to get some work done on this."

Anyway, I want to thank the minister responsible for seniors. Your comments are greatly appreciated. I know that you're a great advocate for seniors, and that you're very knowledgeable, as well, in regard to the situation with seniors and their needs in my particular riding.

Member from Durham: I'm a Chevy man. I love to drive those Chevys. I have my truck and I have my couple of Impalas. Unfortunately, the hose was made outside of this country, and that's why it broke and affected my water pump.

And you're absolutely right. Those payday operations—when people go there, it's out of desperation. It's not because of a must; it's a desperation move that they actually have to get those funds in order to provide for their own families. We've got to find a way to eliminate that.

The member from Davenport was a nice guy to acknowledge you. It's always nice to have visitors listening to our debate. We sometimes forget why we're here, and you're one of the biggest reasons why we're here. So welcome to you this morning.

He's absolutely right: 107 offices is what we have across this province; however, those are the ones who actually utilize our service. Once they come into our office, they don't care if it's a federal or provincial office; they need help. And until we advertise or until we find a way to connect with individuals to find out where those services are available, they're left at home and without assistance.

To the Minister of Rural Affairs: If you're going to thank somebody, thank Mother Nature for the water

levels and the Chi-Cheemaun. That's why you have the jams. The Chi-Cheemaun is able to float and it will bring the nice jams to your area. It will also bring people from southern Ontario onto Manitoulin Island—it is a magical place—and the entire riding. I've met many individuals across the province at Queen's Park, and I do have God's country.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: I'm pleased to join this debate today on Bill 55 as well. I want to share the complete title, because at the end of the title of this bill is what I'm going to speak to, mostly. The title reads, "An Act to amend the Collection Agencies Act, the Consumer Protection Act, 2002 and the Real Estate and Business Brokers Act, 2002 and to make consequential amendments to other Acts." That's the phrase I want to come back to and revisit.

Before I do, I want to talk about the relevance of what we're doing here and why our PC caucus is supporting Bill 55 to get it into committee, because it does indeed need further review.

Let's talk about real estate transactions for a while—improvements, as my colleague said. Absolutely. First things first: With regard to real estate transactions, buying a house may be the biggest purchase an individual will ever make in their life. You put trust in real estate agents, and unfortunately there could be a bad seed that just turns everything upside down. As we've come to know in Parliament, as we have come to know in this Ontario government, it only takes one or two bad seeds to turn a governing party upside down, like we saw yesterday with the intent to permanently delete emails. It's absolutely abysmal.

Coming back to the real estate industry, I have to say that we do need to take a look at how we can strengthen the rules around this market. While we're doing that, I might even suggest that we take a look at my colleague from Prince Edward-Hastings, because he has a bill, and has talked about it for some time, about the need for electronic signatures on real estate transactions. It will cut down the transaction time—the phantom offers that do tend to be part of the problem in the current industry as we know it today—and we can do transactions in real time.

So when Bill 55 gets to committee and we have an opportunity to improve it, I really hope sincerely that political colours do not taint the manner in which we address this, and that my colleague from Prince Edward-Hastings will actually have his bill considered in terms of how to improve the real estate industry in terms of facilitating transactions, and actually moving it into the 21st century. But there's more to talk about.

The next example would be the debt settlement agencies. Unfortunately, we've come to realize that it's not only the Ontario Liberal government that is forcing Ontario taxpayers to live on credit cards, but individuals throughout this province, for whatever reason, are indeed accruing more and more debt. It's a pretty serious and

daunting effort to manage that debt. Just like in the real estate industry, it only takes a couple of bad seeds to turn all of that upside down. So I'm glad to see that Bill 55 potentially will help strengthen consumer protection with regard to debt settlement.

I'd be remiss if I didn't point out that part and parcel of managing debt comes awareness and comes education. That's why I'm proud that the PC caucus had the foresight to talk about financial literacy in our PC Paths to Prosperity. You know what? This education system of ours today has just gotten way out of hand. We've gotten away from the basics: food literacy, electricity literacy, financial literacy. People in high school and people in grade 7 and grade 8 should be thinking about living within their means. My goodness. I know this Ontario Liberal government isn't setting an example, but we could start at a young age and help people realize that they do indeed have to manage their financials very, very carefully. So while we do have to rein in the issues around debt settlement agencies, there is so much more we can do. I feel strongly that the PC caucus has set an example to be followed when we talk about financial literacy, and I hope that will be taken seriously as well.

In this Consumer Protection Act, we talk about the need for consumer protection against those greasy salespeople out there. I found it interesting, because I totally agreed, when the member from Algoma-Manitoulin was talking about the various scenarios that are out there with regard to the type of door-to-door salesmen that come and knock on your door. It made me think of my own personal example of wind turbine salespeople.

That's where I come back to the title of this Bill 55. This bill, in the title, specifically says it has the opportunity to make consequential amendments to other acts. I would invite this government and the committee that reviews Bill 55 to seriously take a look at how industrial wind turbines have been absolutely mismanaged and thrust upon jurisdictions throughout rural Ontario. It is a travesty how people have been approached and mishandled and pressured into signing contracts that they, quite frankly, don't understand because they're so convoluted. It's just abysmal.

My husband and I were on the receiving end of it. We got the phone calls. We had the salesmen travelling around our concessions in south Bruce. We even were told that our neighbours had signed, and we'd be missing out if we didn't sign. Well, little did that greasy salesperson know that the farm to the east of us was owned by my brother and sister-in-law, and there was no way they were signing.

I'm just so glad that, on record, the member from Algoma-Manitoulin cited so many different scenarios of door-to-door salespeople who take advantage of consumers, because I can say "ditto" when it comes to how green energy and the development of industrial wind turbines have been thrust upon rural Ontario. It's totally unacceptable, and it needs to be brought to an end.

The aggressive tactics that are used are just not right. We talk about our vulnerable people. The good member

from Durham talked about how greasy salespeople tend to prey on vulnerable people, and that has happened. Across the countryside, in rural Ontario, again—I'm focusing on this because it's a real-life, recent example of how people can be abused, pressured and intimidated into signing contracts. That's why we need to really examine how consumers can be protected.

In particular, there are amendments specifically to two items that will give some teeth to this bill, if you will, and really get to the root of the problem of protecting consumer rights. One issue is that it's very, very difficult to cancel long-term contracts. We have to take a look at that.

Also, within that cooling-off period that is prescribed right now, customers, when they talk to their neighbours or have a sober second thought, find it very, very difficult to cancel the service that they were pressured into signing for. You know, that consumer's either put on hold or he's just passed around from department to department until he gives up. There are also scare tactics that sometimes seem to be used.

0930

You know what? These companies have been charged in the past, and we have to get back to holding people accountable for their actions—much like the Privacy and Integrity Commissioner did yesterday. She ousted the Ontario Liberal government for purposely deleting emails pertaining to the gas plant scandal. It was not legal to do. So Ontario taxpayers need to be protected as well, just like consumers through Bill 55.

Again, I have to come back and revisit the fact that, when it comes to an example of the worst type of salespeople who go door to door, in rural Ontario, in my riding, it's the people who try to lock in electricity rates and people who have gone through the communities, ripping them apart, trying to sell contracts for industrial wind turbines. Honestly, the tactics that have been used: autographed hockey player pictures, offers of tickets to sporting events, pressuring people by saying, "You're the only one who's not signing." The examples could go on and on and on.

That's why the PC caucus is okay to support Bill 55 and to get it into committee, because there are so many ways that this bill could be improved upon. Again, I invite people to go back and take a look at the last part of the title: "and to make consequential amendments to other Acts." Specifically, I would like to take this opportunity to suggest to the committee reviewing that, in terms of making consequential amendments to other acts, they need to revisit the Green Energy Act because the realities are that contracts and the manner that they've been facilitated have to stop.

I would also suggest to the committee reviewing Bill 55 that when it comes to industrial wind turbine salespeople, this act could also support municipalities that have chosen to be unwilling. For instance, Bill 55 could say, "Industrial wind turbine salespeople, you cannot go in and knock door to door or travel concession to concession in municipalities that have chosen to be unwilling

hosts for the industrial wind turbine scenario”—that is being imposed throughout this province at a time when we're selling electricity and paying other jurisdictions to take the surplus off our hands. I look forward to seeing this improved.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Questions and comments?

Mr. John Vanthof: It's once again an honour to be able to stand here and talk for the residents of Timiskaming-Cochrane on Bill 55 and make some comments on the member from Huron-Bruce. Basically, this is a bill that's—I call it stronger protection for consumers. I think we can all agree; I think we all want to see this bill go forward to committee and make some improvements.

I think we're chasing a running target, because I can remember, when I was first married—it was a long time ago—it was vacuum cleaners, big-time vacuum cleaners. We got the call that we had won a trip to Florida, if we'd just check out this vacuum cleaner. The person came; it was kind of interesting, because we didn't have any furniture and he was showing us how this vacuum cleaner was going to work. My first question was, "Well, can we sit on it?" I'm making light of it, but this guy was trained and he was incredibly good at his job. Even though we didn't have any furniture, we almost bought a vacuum cleaner which we didn't need. And it hasn't changed yet.

The one improvement I think we could make to this—right now it's water heaters; it was Direct Energy. Right now in my riding it's water filtration. So they call up, "Can we test your water and see? It's town water, but you probably need a water filtration system"—for thousands of dollars. We need to make sure that we can open this up so that it goes more after the problem and not just after the flavour of the day—which might be water heaters—because this is an ongoing problem. We can't stop people from going door to door, but we can give the people who are behind the doors more rights to defend their decisions.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Questions and comments?

Mr. Joe Dickson: It's a pleasure to speak on Bill 55.

Stronger protection: We all need stronger protection at the door. Some of the salespeople are just so misleading, you really don't know if you're coming or going by the time they're finished. It's an easy sale for them; they're professionals. They know what they're doing and they know how to do it, and they know how to take advantage of clientele.

The fact that it's going to protect consumers from high-pressure, door-to-door sales is a major one for me. I see it on an ongoing basis and my very busy staff deals with it on an ongoing basis. We do our very best to help and protect them in the future. This will protect the vulnerable, indebted consumers as well from predatory debt settlement services, and that's a major concern out there. I, personally, have dealt with them on behalf of residents; it's an ongoing saga. The fact that in 2012 there were over 3,000 complaints certainly speaks for itself. It's something that has to be addressed, and I like what I see in the bill.

I can tell you that it's going to prohibit upfront services fees. It's going to prohibit misleading sales practices and advertising.

I did have a staff member who worked with that and helped people virtually daily, who ended up going to a contractor for a deck and advanced the contractor \$1,500. The contractor never came back. The staffer had to go through a process of going to court. The perpetrator actually was convicted and our staffer did get the money back, but it's a long process.

I really like Bill 55 and I'm certainly prepared to support it.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Questions and comments?

Mr. John O'Toole: I came this morning primarily to listen to the member from Huron-Bruce. I liked her style of not avoiding the real issue of the three parts of the bill—debt settlement and door-to-door sales and real estate—but she wove in a web of related issues which I felt are relevant to the discussion, specifically for her passion on the Green Energy Act. She's probably the lead voice in trying to bring a voice for those who are opposed to wind turbines. She's done a marvellous job on that file, and I think weaving it back in to protect the consumers—it makes good sense to raise these issues.

I think her remark with respect to the privacy commissioner, Ms. Cavoukian, on the accountability or the potential that they broke the law—I think Ann Cavoukian said that they did break the law. I think it was criminal, basically. But I think that's protecting consumers. She was protecting, she was giving voice to the consumers of Ontario as taxpayers. So I commend her for her remarks and her way of intricately weaving a web of distrust, technically.

I find it difficult now to trust the government, and I think many of the consumers—this bill itself. Actually the bill, particularly on the debt settlement, if you look at it, it doesn't do what it's supposed to do. The legislation must ensure that debt settlement contracts make your chosen settler the recipient of collection calls. This bill does not do that. So if you look at it, it's been poorly crafted, hastily crafted, and it has to go to committee.

I know the minister's here this morning. Welcome; have a wonderful day. That's a beautiful colour you have on this morning. But that's not what it's about; none of this is personal. Doing the right thing is what I'm really talking about, and the member from Huron-Bruce, I thought, did a wonderful job.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member for Algoma-Manitoulin.

Mr. Michael Mantha: I always love being in this House when my colleague from Timiskaming-Cochrane is in here because he lit a little spark in me. He talked about a vacuum incident that he had. Well, let me tell you about an incident that I had, with my wife, where a door knocker came to my door trying to sell us an encyclopedia. We needed this series of encyclopedia because our kids could not make it through school in order to get the education that they need. They would not be able to

survive. Hell, they made it sound like it was oxygen. Guess what? We didn't have any kids. It's just amazing how they can come to your door and sell you anything that they want.

0940

Anyway, also I just wanted to comment on a wise comment that the member from Timiskaming–Cochrane's father made to him as a young man, and I think it's important for us: "If you need it, go to the store and get it. If it comes to your door, you don't need it." That's a wise saying that he was beneficial in receiving from his father and I thought it was important to mention.

What I did want to say in the very limited time that I have: I don't know if you've heard the expression of "bait and switch." The bait and switch is where you get a call or you get a piece of literature in your mail telling you that there are all types of savings for your cellphone, for your cable, for your hydro, for your water heater, and so on and so forth. That's the bait. You bite on the bait, you do the call and you do the interaction with them. They either come to your door or you do the interaction over the phone. Lo and behold, by the time the call is done or the service is delivered and the explanations are done, you're paying more for what you didn't need in the first place or you're getting a lot more headaches for something you didn't need at all.

Getting this to committee is going to be really good, because we need to really look at the clause-by-clause and we really need to look at eliminating the reduction and the elimination of the benefits that we don't actually need but the services we essentially need as well.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member for Huron–Bruce, you've got two minutes for a response.

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I wish I had more time, because the comments from my colleagues in the House today have just generated so many thoughts that I would like to touch on. I really appreciate everyone's perspective.

The member from Algoma–Manitoulin: It's interesting. You made a really good point with the encyclopedias. If you don't need it, you need protection, instead of being threatened and pressured into buying something, much like the vacuum that we heard about earlier. In particular to that member, thank you for sharing that comment from the member from Timiskaming–Cochrane: "If it comes to your door, you don't need it." How rich is that? When you think about all the surplus energy we have and how our industrial wind turbines are going up from community to community—it's the door-to-door salesperson. Full circle right there: We're taking time and taking Ontario taxpayers' dollars to pay jurisdictions to take surplus energy off our hands, and the salespeople keep coming to our door.

If it comes to your door, you don't need it. And that's why I really like the title of Bill 55. I really hope that this committee, when it gets into review, that the Green Energy Act will also, in the spirit of the title of the Consumer Protection Act—that "consequential amendments to

other Acts" will seriously take a look at how green energy is thrust upon people from door to door in rural Ontario.

Interjection.

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: It's about door-to-door salespeople, and that's exactly how the industrial—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Minister, come to order.

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: —wind turbine has just spiralled out of control.

It's interesting. The member from Durham was so right. He finds it hard to trust this government. Who does, this day? Look what they've done to us: from scandal to scandal; now to illegal activity by permanently deleting emails.

You know what? The member from Ajax–Pickering: I totally agree with you, member from Ajax–Pickering. It's about protecting people.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Can I ask the members on the government side to come to order? You're entitled to an opinion but I think you're entitled to listen also.

Further debate.

Mr. Michael Prue: I'll try to get this debate back on to the bill itself. But I do have to admit: I find door-to-door salespeople, no matter what they're selling, mostly to be reprehensible. Maybe one day in this Legislature, we will ban the practice altogether, because selling door-to-door is, in my view, one of the sleaziest jobs a person could possibly have. Anyway—

Interjection.

Mr. Michael Prue: But we don't make anybody sign on the line, nor do we ask for money.

Mr. Speaker, as a politician for many years, both municipally and provincially, I have had complaints come to my office about door-to-door salespeople. I have had them come particularly in the last little while about water heater salespeople. I do know that they have affected even my own family.

The last time, when this bill was first introduced, and I had an opportunity to speak for a couple of minutes on the bill, I told the story about my parents living in Bancroft. They were retired. They were, at that point, in their late 70s, and a door-to-door water heater salesman came and convinced my father that he was not in compliance with the local code of the town in which they lived, which was right near Bancroft.

My father, I think, listened to him and signed on the line. When he came back into the house, my mother was extremely upset. She, first of all, berated my father, and justifiably so, for having been so gullible to buy this water heater salesman's malarkey and sign on the line.

She chased the guy down the street, but he ran away. She came back to the house. She called the police because she didn't know what else to do. The OPP arrived in the little town of Cardiff, went up and down the streets,

found the water heater salesperson and made him go back to each and every house that he had a signed contract with and made him ask the people if they really wanted it. By that time—this was a cooling-off period of under an hour—I believe everyone in the town said no. They were elderly people.

The town of Cardiff was a former mining town, much like Elliot Lake. When the mines went out, there was no work, but people found cheap housing and many people retired there. It was in cottage country. It may not have been on a lake, but it was convenient to all the local facilities in Bancroft and around there. That's the kind of town that these people seek out. It's the kinds of neighbourhoods that they seek out.

But I want to fast-forward to last week. I was out doing a little bit of gardening on the weekend, and a guy walked up to me. He had a badge, and he had all kinds of paraphernalia on his person. He told me that he was in the neighbourhood because the water heaters in our neighbourhood weren't very good.

I looked him straight in the eye, and I said, "I'm not interested, sir." He said, "But you have to be interested, because your water heater's probably not up to code, and we have an opportunity here to bring your water heater up to code, to do some ventilation that you require," and all those ridiculous things. He looked me straight in the eye, and he was really quite convincing. Not to me, of course, but I'm sure he would have been convincing to many.

I told him I was not interested and, in fact, I found what he was doing to be reprehensible, that his job and what he was doing was preying on elderly people and those who were not too clear in their heads and could be easily influenced by his lies. I told him that. He took some umbrage at that. He told me he was a legitimate salesperson and that he was selling a legitimate product. I told him, at the end, I said, "No. Please, sir. I'm not interested. In fact, what I would like to do is completely make sure that you never have an opportunity to sell another thing again." I would say to anybody who's watching on this television that you should tell them the same thing: You are not interested, nor should they be allowed to sell.

This bill was a little bit timid on that. This bill says they're going to increase the cooling-off period to 20 days. But what should really be happening, because there have been so many complaints registered against these salespeople selling water heaters, is that this government should be taking, in my view, stronger action. They should be outlawing them. It should be against the law for them to come there, door to door, selling a product that people don't need, under false pretenses about ventilation that's not necessary, about changes to the building code or the municipal standards which are absolutely not true.

I told him I wanted to do him out of a job, and he was very angry. But, you know, these guys have so much chutzpah. I ordered him off my property because he didn't want to go, and then he asked me if he could use

my washroom in the house. I told him no; I think he had to suffer just a little bit until he could find someone else at another house that would even let him near.

Mr. John Vanthof: Someone with an approved toilet. 0950

Mr. Michael Prue: Yes, someone with an approved toilet.

This is the reality of what's out there. I am looking forward to this bill being passed, not because I think it does enough—I don't think it does enough, because having a 20-day cooling-off period and some of the other things contained within the bill is a very, very minor step, and what we really need is to get rid of this.

I did hear the former speaker who was up, the member from Huron-Bruce, and I did like the stories of my colleagues from Algoma-Manitoulin and—

Mr. John Vanthof: Timiskaming-Cochrane.

Mr. Michael Prue: —Timiskaming-Cochrane. I can only get Cochrane there.

It's true. Door-to-door salespeople who are asking for a signature are the worst. I don't find it all that bad when an encyclopedia salesman comes by. They don't come by anymore because they don't even print encyclopedias anymore. Everything's online.

I don't mind so much when a kid comes by selling chocolate bars to raise funds for his house. I don't mind when anybody has a product that you can buy and leave it in your house—

Interjection: It doesn't change your life.

Mr. Michael Prue: It doesn't change your life. But I do find it reprehensible when all they're looking for is a signature that binds you to a contract for something you don't need, and when there is not an actual product changing hands on the spot. I don't believe this province should be allowing people like that to prey upon the weak, the elderly and those who are not of a mind to be able to recognize a con when one is in front of them.

A couple of other things here that are in the bill—the debt settlement. I think the ideas here are right in terms of debt settlement and how people have to understand the contract they're signing. They may not get door-to-door salespeople coming, but they see an ad, they watch television. They see somebody standing up saying, "I used to be hopelessly in debt. Now I'm debt-free. This wonderful company helped me." They're finding the creditors closing in on them because of credit card purchases or bad investments or everything else, and they reach out and they often pay money which is not justifiable in the long term. They find out that their debts do not go down significantly, and in fact they've found themselves in another form of debt and a contract they can't get out of.

It is important that this be regulated and it is important that we also advise people: Don't buy a pig in a poke. Don't buy something you don't need, and don't buy something just because you saw a flashy ad on television, when the reality is, if you're in debt, the only way you're ever going to get out of it is by being disciplined yourself—being disciplined and forthright and honest, and make the necessary phone calls and come to some

kind of agreement. Go to a bank, if you can; get a loan from a bank at 4% or 5%. It's better than being in debt at 27% and 28% from the credit card companies, because those kinds of debts are literally almost impossible to ever pay off.

In terms of multiple offers—just a couple of words on those. I have the greatest of respect for the Toronto Real Estate Board, with whom I deal a lot. They are around this place. I think most real estate agents do a very good job in selling houses. In fact, I've bought a couple of houses in my life, and I've looked at many others through real estate agents. I find them to be professional people. But there are, as always, a few of them out there who will try to increase monies for the seller and increase the money and the cost for the buyer by coming up with a scheme like multiple offers.

I had a complaint only a couple of weeks ago from a gentleman—not complaining on his own behalf but because his children were caught up in this web of multiple offer after multiple offer on a house that they really liked, and he felt that it was horrible. I told him about this bill, and he was glad that it was coming along.

I would command the minister for what is contained within the body of the bill. It is a timid bill, but it is a bill nonetheless that will help some people in the long term. Please, all of us, start thinking about doing away with this dishonesty, this reprehensible practice of people coming door to door. Make sure that this is a province where the consumer is king.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Questions and comments?

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: I'm really, really happy to be here this morning to speak again to this bill. I've been listening carefully to this debate and the other ones before. I just want to emphasize that this is a bill that is about standing up for consumers, and it's a well-thought-out bill, Speaker. We've consulted with stakeholders in the industry. We've looked at other jurisdictions. Where are we leading? Where are we lagging? This is about protecting consumers, the vulnerable consumers; it's making sure that people know their rights and responsibilities when they sign contracts and have sufficient time to rethink that if need be.

I worry when I hear some of the debate going beyond what's really in this bill. This bill is about door-to-door sales of water heaters because—guess what, Speaker?—there were 3,200 complaints alone to my ministry last year just on this file. That is why we're focusing on those kinds of sales.

I hear what other members are saying, and for sure we can look at other door-to-door sales practices, but we have to be careful. There are things called constitutional rights here. I think the member from Beaches-East York identified some very legitimate situations of people coming to the door: children selling things for schools, newspaper carriers collecting fees and so on.

We have to be careful about this. I think when we do consumer protection legislation, we have to be clear what problem we're trying to solve. So this bill is indeed very

much focused on that in terms of door-to-door sales of water heaters; in terms of debt settlement companies and what they're allowed to do, again, trying to support our most vulnerable consumers; and modernizing real estate transactions and protecting consumers in terms of phantom bids, allowing them just simply to be able to have verification about how many bids did occur on a transaction. This is what it's all about.

I encourage all the parties to work together and move this bill forward.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Questions and comments?

Mr. Jeff Yurek: I'm proud to add a little bit to this conversation here, and I do have to say I think it's great that we're looking out for the water heater salespeople who are out there. I could say in my riding, we get numerous calls at my constituency office where some senior has been taken advantage of at the door, and now their children have come and found out they've signed a contract, and they can't get out of it. Of course, we go into action and work for our constituent and find a solution one way or the other, but I don't think we should have that step in that process. I think it's necessary to help give this cool-off period.

My concerns with this bill would be the enforcement of this cool-off period. I've known many organizations from which you want to cancel out of that put you through the hoops with the phone calling in order that you get frustrated, just give up and go on with the contract. I'll take this moment to pick on Bell, because I've had a personal experience with them when I wanted to cancel my TV and Internet and phone because I'd had enough of the service I was getting. It must have been three or four hours before I finally got on the phone with someone who wanted to promise me the world just to keep my contract.

Anyway, I'd like to talk to the minister further about how we're going to work to see that when someone really wants to cancel this policy, they're not given the hoops in order to get frustrated and, therefore, come to my office so that I can have my office staff call and stay on the phone for hours trying to get this rectified.

I think protecting the seniors on this matter is a great idea. My people listening at home have talked about vacuum salesmen and encyclopaedias. The younger side of us probably have never seen that at the doors. The new scam today is, last week I had someone at my door wanting me to give money to their charity that I'd never heard of. But they had this form they printed on the Internet, "Please give me cash," and you'll get by. So there are lots of scams going on out there. As the member from Algoma-Manitoulin said, "If they come to your door and you don't need it, just shut the door and walk away." I think that's your best advice.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Questions and comments?

Mr. John Vanthof: It's always a pleasure to follow the member from Beaches-East York, my colleague. He always brings issues down to their base, down to the

people he represents. I think, especially in a bill like this, it's very important, because this bill needs to be strengthened, but it can help people, and that's really important.

The member from Elgin—Middlesex—London brings up a very good point—

Mr. Jeff Yurek: Always.

Mr. John Vanthof: Sometimes. The cooling-off period is a good thing, but how do we stop the runaround? How can the government help to make sure that, when someone decides to change their mind, they don't get the ultimate runaround?

I can give you an example. In a plug for real estate agents, I just sold the farm, and it went very well—very well. But when I tried to change my satellite dish contract to my new house, it took longer than selling my farm. Don't you hate it? Because I had to call and call and call; it was ridiculous.

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Mr. Jeff Yurek: Use your staff.

Mr. John Vanthof: I did that personally, actually, because it's my personal business.

But that's part of the problem. We have to get through to companies. Hopefully we can legislate that somehow consumers have that period, but they also have the right to expect fair service and reasonable answers. I think that's really important. One thing—the member from Beaches—East York had a very good definition: This should be bigger than water heaters. Something that you have to sign a long-term contract for shouldn't be forced on you door-to-door.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Questions and comments. The Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure.

Interjections.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: Sorry for missing my cue there, Mr. Speaker; it's been a long session.

I want to thank my friend from Beaches—East York for his normal and usual thoughtful interventions, and the member for Elgin—Middlesex. You've heard me say—

Interjection.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: No, I've got that; don't worry.

As I've said, we have private members' bills this afternoon. I always like this place when it's at its least partisan. I'm always amazed when we get into things that actually matter to our families—the member from Timiskaming—Cochrane talked about family experiences—when we do these things that Bill 55 does, which is just making people's lives better. It allows people to live more safely in their homes and not to be exploited. We so often get up in such ridiculous partisan furies over things, but when we actually get down to sharing our ideas about a piece of legislation like this one—which I think every party here and every member here sees as a practical solution—all of us, with our constituency offices, get that done. It's always a better place. For many of us who have served as mayors and local councillors, which is many of the people in this House, we sometimes miss the days when we could just be people, have friendships and work on ideas.

One of the things I like—and I'm very proud of our Premier and members opposite, the leaders of the opposition parties—is, I think that we're doing more collaborative work than I've seen in the three or four years that I've been in this House. I've said that many of the newer members are bringing fresher eyes on this. I think that if we continue to show that kind of respect for the people we represent, put the people's business ahead of politics and have more debates around the substance of making people's lives better, not only will this House get more done, I think the esteem in which the people we represent hold us will be much higher, and we will be much happier—all-around good things.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member from Beaches—East York, you have two minutes for a reply.

Mr. Michael Prue: Thank you to those who commented: the Minister of Consumer Services, the member for Elgin—Middlesex—London, the member from Timiskaming—Cochrane and the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation. This is a fairly simple bill. I don't know what day we're on, but we must have been going for a while, because we're down to 10-minute speeches. I have not heard every member speak to this bill, but I would be surprised if anyone has spoken against it.

The minister, in her comments, said that her ministry alone received 3,200 complaints last year about door-to-door salespeople selling water heaters. That's just one thing. It's not people selling candy; it's not people selling any myriad number of services. It's people, door-to-door, selling water heaters. When the consumers of this province find one group that is behaving so badly, then it behooves anyone to take the necessary action.

I am not sure that the remedy outlined is a remedy that is going to stop some of this reprehensible practice. It will help consumers in the short run, but it will only help them if they realize that they've been scammed—if they can get to their local MPP, if they can get on the phone and actually get someone at the other end who will answer it to reply within the 20 days. If they've scammed you at the door and then they phone up to re-scam you on the phone, not much has been saved.

These kinds of people should be put out of business. The only ones at this stage who can do it are the consumers. So anybody watching here today, if one of these guys comes to your door—I don't even care if you need a new water heater—you should shut the door. There are other places to buy that water heater where you're not going to be robbed.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Mr. Frank Klees: I'm joining this debate and I'm going to be putting forward perhaps a very different perspective but one that I believe we, as legislators, need to consider.

I too look forward to having this bill advance to committee, where we hopefully will be able to consider all of the facts that are affecting this consumer market. Because of the time constraint that I have, I'm going to

be focusing on the water heater issue, which is much more complex than I think we—certainly it's more complex than the discussion that I've heard so far today.

I will say at the outset, my colleague the member for Beaches—East York made some very strong statements this morning, and I'm going to disagree with him, and the reason is—to make the comment that door-to-door sales is—and I'm going to quote the honourable member—"the sleaziest job that one could ever have."

Mr. Speaker, there are many people in our communities today who are desperate for jobs. To paint everybody who is a door-to-door salesperson as sleazy, I find highly offensive. I watch people who are going door-to-door, and they do so in all weather. I guess perhaps one of the reasons—and I look at the minister. She's here, and she's shaking her head.

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: There are scammers.

Mr. Frank Klees: They're all scammers, she said.

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: No, I didn't say "all." I didn't say that.

Mr. Frank Klees: Yes, and that is it.

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: I didn't say that.

Mr. Frank Klees: And that is my point: not all of them. What we're doing here is, we are putting everyone into exactly that same bushel. Speaker, there are honourable men and women whose only opportunity for a job is to be a door-to-door salesperson. Rather than painting everyone as sleazy or as scammers, as the minister now is saying, I can tell you what we should be doing—

Interjection.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): I'd ask the minister to calm down and please keep order.

Would you speak through the Chair?

Mr. Frank Klees: I'm glad to speak to the Chair, but when I hear the minister, of all people, interjecting as she is, I find it offensive. On behalf of the many people in this province who have no other choice but to be working in door-to-door sales—and God bless them that they're willing to do it; it's not an easy job. I have done it. I have done it, and it's not easy. It's not easy to get up in the morning and it's not easy to be rejected at the door when what you're trying to do is bring home an honest living.

Yes, there are those who are not going about their job in a very ethical way, but Speaker, we have those people here as well. There are politicians and there are senators and there are police officers who, on occasion, do the wrong thing; there are doctors and nurses and people in every profession who get off the rails and who aren't doing things according to the book. But that doesn't mean, especially as legislators here, that we demean those people and call them sleazy or scammers. Yes, there are those, and that's why we need legislation and that's why we need the appropriate enforcement mechanisms. That's why there should be consequences for those people who are not doing or conducting business ethically.

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What I want to do is point something else out, and it's very strange that there's nothing here—and I haven't

heard the minister talk about this at all. Supposedly, the people who are doing things right are the companies that don't have people selling water heaters door to door. They are the two major companies in the province of Ontario, the utilities, or at least the child of those utilities.

I want to, for the record, read into the record this announcement from the Competition Bureau, dated December 20, 2012. For the record, Speaker: "The Competition Bureau announced today that it is taking action against Direct Energy Marketing Limited and Reliance Comfort Limited Partnership, two companies that rent water heaters to residential customers in Ontario.

"Following an extensive investigation, the bureau determined that Direct Energy and Reliance each engaged in practices that intentionally suppress competition and restrict consumer choice. Specifically, each company implemented water heater return policies and procedures aimed at preventing consumers from switching to competitors. This anti-competitive conduct affects consumers, other rental water heater companies, and businesses that sell water heaters, such as home improvement centres.

"Currently, when Direct Energy or Reliance customers wish to switch to another provider, they must contend with a number of practices and procedures intended to frustrate the return process for their rented water heaters, including,

"—a requirement to call to obtain authorization to return a rented water heater;

"—aggressive retention tactics during these calls;

"—restrictions on when and where water heaters can be returned; and

"—unwarranted fees and charges."

Speaker, the Competition Bureau, for the first time ever, is actually recommending penalties of \$15 million and \$10 million to Direct Energy and Reliance, for doing what? Here's what they do. And so, these so-called sleazy people, who have made sales at the door to people who willingly want that new water heater—here's what happens. These so-called honourable companies get on the phone. They call those people and they spend all kinds of time on the phone with them building fear into them, suggesting that they have been swindled, suggesting that they have been scammed. And those same people who don't know any better now—yes, seniors, and people for whom perhaps English is not their first language—the first thing they now think is, "My God, what have I done wrong?" And of course they're now going to be concerned, and the first thing they do is they call the minister of consumer protection. Now what you've got are people who thought that they had entered into an agreement to purchase a water heater, and the first thing they get is this kind of response.

Mr. Speaker, the Competition Bureau does not investigate issues lightly. This was an extensive investigation, and at the end of the day, orders were issued against two major utility companies. For what? Anti-competitive behaviour: fines of \$15 million and \$10 million. Why? Because, in their nice little offices, in their high-rise offices,

the people—no one would call those people who go to work behind those telephones at their desks sleazy or scammers; no. That's okay for them to do. Well, Minister, I'd like to know, then, where is there anything in your bill that deals with that anti-competitive behaviour, that kind of sleazy conduct, that kind of telephone call that then suppresses people, intimidates people and infuses fear?

We do need this to go to committee, Speaker, because it's a much bigger issue than the simplistic attitude of calling hard-working people sleazy and scammers.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Seeing the time on the clock, this House stands recessed until 10:30.

The House recessed from 1015 to 1030.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: It's my pleasure to introduce my long-standing assistant and a long-standing friend of the Ontario PC caucus, Filomena da Silva, who is here in the members' west gallery today.

Mr. Jonah Schein: Today I'd like to welcome to the Legislature the family of Davenport page Simon LiVolsi. Welcome to Lee Mendelsohn-LiVolsi, Simon's mother; David and Jenny Mendelsohn, Simon's grandparents; and Ami and Steve Mendelsohn, Simon's great-aunt and great-uncle, visiting all the way from South Africa. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: I don't think they're here yet, Speaker, but I want to welcome the grade 7 class from Holy Redeemer school in Pickering. They're here for a tour of the Legislature, and I was thrilled to meet with them this morning.

Mr. Robert Bailey: It's my pleasure today to introduce the family of page Hannah Lacey, up in the gallery: her father, Tom, and her grandparents John and Diane, who are no strangers here. They've been here a number of times. Welcome.

Ms. Helena Jaczek: I'd like to welcome the parents of my page, Alex Hu. They are Feng Shao and Yimin Hu, in the east members' gallery. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Mrs. Jane McKenna: Today I'd again like to welcome page Eric's mother, Heather Weaver-Orosz, and his sister, Abigail.

Hon. Jeff Leal: They haven't arrived yet, but I anticipate that Ross Davies and his mother, Pam Norguard, will be with us today in the members' east gallery. They won a lunch in Peterborough with their MPP, so they're looking forward to viewing question period and enjoying lunch. We welcome them to Queen's Park.

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: I'd like to introduce the father of Vanessa Ortelli, who is the page captain today: Scott Ortelli; also, her grandmothers, Beryl Ortelli and Lorraine Babb. Welcome to the Legislature.

Ms. Soo Wong: The students from Holy Spirit Catholic school have not arrived, but I wanted to welcome

them to Queen's Park. There are two classes from grades 5 and 6.

Ms. Catherine Fife: It's my pleasure to welcome my nephew, Leo Shrimpton, here this morning. He's a student from Ossington/Old Orchard, and he's job-shadowing me because he wants to end up here one day. Imagine.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I want to welcome to Queen's Park Carole Matthews, who is the mom of our page Michael Sambasivam, and a constituent of mine and sister of our Deputy Premier and health minister.

Mr. Norm Miller: I have the grades 7 and 8 class from Otter Lake Christian School, with their teacher, Steve Weber, from Seguin township. I think they're just starting to arrive in the Legislature, in the east visitors' gallery. I'd like to welcome them here to Queen's Park today.

Mr. Joe Dickson: I'd like to take the opportunity to introduce the entire family of Carlo Padilla, seated in the west gallery, in the front row. I can count two, four, six, seven, eight. They're all here to enjoy his good work.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Allow me, on behalf of the member from Richmond Hill, the Minister of Research and Innovation—for page Jimmy Yan: the parents, Chester Yan and Yanlan Zhou. Welcome to Queen's Park, and thank you for being here.

We have with us today in the Speaker's gallery a delegation from the Parliament of the Kingdom of Lesotho, led by the Speaker of the National Assembly, the Honourable Sephiri Enoch Motanyane. The delegation is accompanied by the High Commissioner to Canada, Dr. 'Mathabo Tsepa. Welcome to the delegation from Lesotho. They're here to find out how the Parliament works.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): That was an inside joke for the members.

ORAL QUESTIONS

ACCESS TO INFORMATION

Mr. Victor Fedeli: My question is for the Premier. The privacy commissioner said yesterday that the destruction of emails by senior officials within the Premier's office and Ministry of Energy was the most serious case she'd investigated in her 15-year career.

In her conclusion, she notes, "Ignorance is no excuse. Transparency of government activities, reflected in their records, is essential to freedom and liberty." She also noted that government information has been removed and put on external USB drives. Speaker, it has been stolen from the Legislature.

Premier, the law has been broken, and we've requested today that the OPP launch an investigation. Will you agree with us and instruct your Attorney General to launch a police investigation into the deletion of emails by senior Liberal staffers?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please.
Premier?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: It is the member opposite's prerogative to ask whatever he chooses. I have said that I am very grateful that Dr. Cavoukian has written her report. We're examining her findings.

I agree with her conclusions that this should not have happened. I have committed to making changes to ensure that all staff are following the rules—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Halton, come to order. The member from Leeds-Grenville, come to order. The member from Prince Edward-Hastings, come to order.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Durham, come to order. Who's next?

Finish, please.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: It's not my wont to respond to heckling, but the reality is that the heckling from across the floor—"You know what, this is no big deal"—it is a big deal. It's a very serious deal, and that is why we have taken action. I agree with the conclusions of the privacy commissioner.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Premier, the privacy commissioner relayed shocking details on the activities of Craig McLennan, the former chief of staff at the energy ministry, and David Livingston, the former chief of staff to former Premier McGuinty. Livingston asked the secretary of cabinet in January how to "wipe clean the hard drives in the Premier's office."

She said, "During our meeting with Livingston, we learned that his information ... practices were very similar to those of MacLennan.... He also deleted his emails daily."

There was a systematic Liberal attempt to thwart the democratic and legal rights of members of this Legislature and to make sure that those documents never saw the light of day.

Premier, there are grounds for a police investigation here. Will you join us and have your Attorney General request a formal police investigation into this crime?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please.

Premier?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Since I have been in this role, there has been a systematic and intentional attempt to provide every piece of information that is available and asked for, and that is what we've been doing. We have trained staff. We have put in place a clear directive that all of the rules will be followed and that all of the information will be made available.

I agree with Dr. Cavoukian's conclusions: This should not have happened. We are going to make changes to make sure that it can't happen again.

1040

In the interim, we have already taken actions to make sure that everyone is retaining the information that they

need to and, beyond that, making sure that information that has been asked for, that is relevant to the discussion at the justice committee, has been provided, to the tune of 130,000 documents.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: You say you've put a systematic and intentional system in place, but you are personally responsible for leading and continuing a culture of secrecy that puts Liberal Party interests ahead of those of Ontarians.

You talk about training your staff in retention, but let's talk about using non-FOIable Gmails. We've provided evidence, in this House, that you and your transition team leader have used private Gmail accounts to conduct government business in a deliberate attempt to subvert freedom-of-information laws.

The privacy commissioner says the law has been broken here. She said that "there was a culture of avoiding the creation of written documentation on the gas plants issue," and you're still carrying that on by using secret Gmail accounts.

Premier, will you stand here today and join our party in asking for a police investigation into this cover-up?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock. Be seated, please. Be seated, please.

Premier.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: The OPP are independent, and they will do what they deem best.

The member opposite has those emails. They are not secret, because the member opposite has them. He has access to them; we have provided access to them. At every turn, at every question, we have provided the information that the members opposite have asked for.

That's why we've broadened the mandate—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Order. Stop the clock. The member for Simcoe-Grey, stop. The member from Wellington-Halton Hills, the member from Thornhill, the member from Oxford—thank you.

Finish, please.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: That's why we've broadened the mandate. We wanted the mandate of the justice committee to be broadened so that all of the questions could be asked, so that people could be brought before the committee and all of that investigation that the committee wanted to do could take place.

We have provided 130,000 documents—30,000 from my office. We have put training in place. We are doing everything in our power to make sure that all the rules are followed and all the information is available, including the information that the member opposite is referring to.

ACCESS TO INFORMATION

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: My question is also to the Premier. Yesterday, we learned that the most senior officials in the Premier's office copied government emails and

documents related to the gas plants scandal on to personal drives and then ordered that that information and those documents and that evidence be destroyed.

I'm going to read section 122 of the Criminal Code of Canada, breach of trust: "Every official who, in connection with the duties of his office, commits fraud or a breach of trust is guilty of an indictable offence and liable to imprisonment for a term not exceeding five years, whether or not the fraud or breach of trust would be an offence if it were committed in relation to a private person."

Premier, you have no choice other than to call in the OPP to investigate Dalton McGuinty's former office and your office for this crime. Will you do it?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please.

I would like to ask the member from Oxford: How's your hand? Is it okay?

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: Yes, it's fine.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Premier.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: As I've said, the OPP is an independent body and they will do what they deem is in the best interests of the people of Ontario to do.

I'm very pleased that Dr. Cavoukian has issued this report. I agree with her conclusions. I agree that there need to be changes made and I agree that there needs to be action taken, some of which we have already begun. But we will continue to work with the privacy commissioner to make sure that the changes that are necessary are made so that this won't happen again.

I agree it shouldn't have happened, which is why, from the day that I've been in this office, I have worked to open up this process to make sure that all of the information that was asked for would be available.

The reason that the members opposite are asking these questions—one of the reasons—is that they have the information that we have provided, because that is the right thing to do.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: I find this troubling. The Premier says, "We are going to do better. We need to do better in the future." They keep saying that. They said that about eHealth. They said that about Ornge.

Let's talk about Ornge for a moment. You say that the OPP should do what's in the best interests of the province—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Minister of the Environment.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: —it was the Minister of Health who actually called the OPP in to investigate Ornge. Why don't you speak to your Deputy Premier, Minister? Why don't you talk about the officials in your government who copied data on to personal drives and then destroyed the evidence? That's why the OPP needs to be called in right now. That is why section 341 of the Criminal Code applies here, fraudulent concealment: "Every one who, for a fraudulent purpose, takes, obtains, removes or conceals anything is guilty of an indictable

offence and liable to imprisonment for a term not exceeding two years."

Speaker, would they do it in Ornge because it didn't affect them directly? Why won't they do it here? This minister, this Premier and the former Premier are guilty of a crime.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Order. Stop the clock.

I am going to make a comment about the last statement. I believe that kind of language is—I'm bothered by it, and I would ask the member to guard her questions very carefully. I will be listening carefully to see that it's not done again.

Premier.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I will just say again that we have done absolutely everything possible to make sure that every piece of information, every question that has been asked, every person who has been asked to come—that all of that has been made available to the members opposite, Mr. Speaker, and to the public, because I have said repeatedly that what happened in terms of the relocation of the gas plants should not have happened. There should have been a better process up front.

To the issue of making changes so that none of this would happen again: We have already begun that process. The privacy commissioner acknowledges that we have done training. We have made it clear to staff what the rules are. We will continue to do that. As more questions are asked, we will continue as we began, and that is to provide the information that is asked for by the committee and by the members opposite.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Speaker, they have breached the public archives law that they put in place. They have breached section 122 of the Criminal Code. They have breached section 341 of the Criminal Code.

They called in the OPP when it was convenient on Ornge. Why won't they call in the white-collar crime unit of the OPP here today? Is it because the kathleenowynne@gmail.com account is suspect? Is it because they've been trading information that they don't want the public to see so that they can continue to skirt FOI requests?

Mr. Speaker, this is very serious. If the Premier cannot stand in her place today and look at the public in Ontario and tell them that she will do what's right for them, then we are in trouble as a democracy in this province. They have probably broken the law more than once. The Information and Privacy Commissioner said as much yesterday.

I ask her once again, on behalf of the residents of this province, the people of this province: Will she stand in her place and call in the white-collar crime unit of the OPP?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Thank you.

Premier.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: It is a first principle of mine that I will follow the law, I will follow the rules, and I will make sure that everyone who works for me and works with me follows the law and follows the rules, and I take objection at being accused otherwise.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Be seated, please.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Seats, please. Thank you.

Complete, please.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: And, Mr. Speaker, since I have been in elected office, before I was in this House, when I was a school trustee, I have followed the rules. I have taken advice at every turn.

When I came into this office, I opened up this process around the discussion of the relocation of the gas plants so that all of the questions could be answered. We have rules in place in our office. We have turned over documents. We will continue to answer the questions that are asked of us.

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ACCESS TO INFORMATION

Mr. Peter Tabuns: To the Premier: It was last November when New Democrats raised the fact that documents related to so-called Project Vapour had gone missing from the Premier's office. When this new Premier was sworn in, did she ask why these emails were missing?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: What I did when I came into this office is I made sure that we knew what the rules were, that we put training in place, that we made it clear to everyone who worked in the Premier's office and across government and understood about the retention of information and that the rules were followed. That's what I did when I came into this office.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: In her first week on the job here in the Legislature, I asked the Premier where these missing emails were and what was being done to find them. The Premier could've stood in her place and said, "I have serious concerns." She could have taken action. Instead, she bounced the question to the House leader.

If the Premier was genuinely concerned about Liberal staffers deleting emails and breaking the law, why didn't she do anything to help find them?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I think the member opposite knows that at that point we were very much engaged in what the procedures were going to be, how the committees were going to be structured, exactly what the process was going to be, because we were committed to opening up the process and making sure that all of the questions got answered and that there was a process in place for that kind of openness to take place. I was taking action in our office.

We made sure that all of the rules were followed from the day that I came in, and we have provided information as it has been asked for: 130,000 documents; 30,000 documents from our office. We will continue to behave in that manner.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: The fact is, the Premier had a chance to offer some change. She could have said, "This deletion of emails is wrong. This wiping out of records is wrong. This is possibly illegal and I'm not going to stand for it." She could have asked the tough questions of the staff, of the bureaucrats; instead, she offered more of the same.

If the Premier thought the Liberal government shouldn't have deleted those emails, why didn't she come clean at the time and simply say that this is wrong?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I think my actions speak very clearly by making it clear that we were going to retain information as required, that all the rules were going to be followed—that's exactly, I think, in response to the member's question. That's what we did. We made it clear to staff. We put training in place. We made it very clear that we were going to be following every rule and making sure that all information that needed to be retained was retained.

I agree with the conclusions of the privacy commissioner. We will continue to work with her to make sure that further changes that are necessary are made so that this cannot happen again.

ACCESS TO INFORMATION

Mr. Peter Tabuns: To the Premier, again: Yesterday, Ontario's Information and Privacy Commissioner confirmed what New Democrats had been saying for a long time: that the Liberals were destroying information about the gas plants. It's clear that we need to do more to get answers that people deserve. Will the Premier agree to a full public inquiry to get to the bottom of this?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Mr. Speaker, I know that the House leader will want to speak to the supplementary.

I just want to be clear: As I have said, I agree with the conclusions of the privacy commissioner. I agree that this shouldn't have happened. I agree that there may be further changes that need to be made.

But just to be, again, crystal clear, we have already begun making changes. We began the day that I came into office. We have put training in place. We've made it clear to staff in the Premier's office and across government that information that is to be retained is retained and that any questions that need to be answered in terms of the relocation of the gas plants—that we provide that relevant information.

That's what we've been doing. That's how we began. That's how we will continue.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Premier, the justice committee is doing important work, but Liberal members continue to

call witnesses who were not involved with the cancellation of the gas plants and can't tell us how much of the people's money the Liberal government wasted for its own political gain. Will the Premier do the right thing and call an independent public inquiry?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Government House leader.

Hon. John Milloy: The justice committee mandate was broadened at the request of the Premier. They can undertake an examination into any aspect of this situation, including the documents. The honourable member mentions Liberal witnesses. Well, most of the Liberal witnesses have been Conservative Party candidates who were out with robocalls and pamphlets, knocking on doors and saying, "Vote for us and the gas plant will be done, done, done."

To my friend in the New Democratic Party, I cannot help it that Progressive Conservative candidates are being told not to show up at the committee. But we're going to continue to call them because they are part of a very, very relevant piece of this puzzle.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Nothing says evasion like bouncing a question to the House leader. The Premier has said she wants to be transparent. If the Premier is so committed to openness and transparency, will she call a public inquiry into the gas plant scandal, the waste of public money and the fact that senior Liberals were destroying information that belongs to the public?

Hon. John Milloy: Let me talk about transparency. I mentioned some of the actions of the Premier in broadening the mandate of the committee. If the member wants to talk about the Information and Privacy Commissioner's report, let me quote from what she said, what was said on the news last night. CFTO: "The commissioner has praise for the new Premier, saying, 'Kathleen Wynne has been proactive.'"

Let me quote from the IPC report: "Throughout this entire investigation, my office received the full co-operation of all parties involved, including the Premier's office"—that's the current Premier—"Cabinet Office, the MGS, current and former staff in the Minister of Energy's office, and the Archives of Ontario staff. I appreciate the time taken and the information provided by these offices and by individual staff, as part of this investigation."

The Premier has taken concrete steps to address this issue, and she has asked me, as Minister of Government Services, to continue to see how we can strengthen the act. I will be meeting with the Information and Privacy Commissioner shortly.

ACCESS TO INFORMATION

Mr. Rob Leone: I think the transparency that Ontarians want is an election.

My question is to the Premier. The member from Nipissing and I have drafted a letter asking the OPP to investigate your government's actions in relation to the

deletion of emails surrounding the Oakville and Mississauga power plant scandal.

I'll lay your options out for you, Premier: You can show some contrition and leadership by talking to us today, or you can speak with the police regarding your government's illegal tactics.

Your agenda of openness and transparency has been a farce from the start, and the mere fact that you choose those words to describe your government shows how little respect you have for the people of this province. So, Premier, since you won't acknowledge any wrongdoing on that side of the aisle, will you at least get out of the way when the OPP comes to your office to get to the bottom of this scandal on behalf of the people of Ontario?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Well, as I've said, the OPP is an independent body. The OPP will do what they choose to do. But if the member opposite is suggesting that—if there were a question asked of me by the OPP, would I respond? I take offence at the suggestion that I would not. I absolutely would. I would absolutely comply with anything that I was asked to do by the police. I think the member opposite actually knows that.

As I say, we have worked very hard to provide the information that he and the other members have asked for. We opened up the process. We will continue as we began, providing the information that is relevant to the questioning of the justice committee. We will continue to do that.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Rob Leone: I take great offence that this government continues to hide the truth from the people of Ontario.

You said—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I'm going to ask the member to withdraw, because that is saying something in the back door you can't say in the front door. So will you please withdraw?

Mr. Rob Leone: I withdraw, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Carry on.

Mr. Rob Leone: You sit here in this House talking about instilling accountability and a week later, a report comes out saying how your government deleted accountability from the people of Ontario. Premier, the irony would be laughable if it weren't so shockingly expensive.

I quote from the report: "Without a written record of how key government decisions are made, the government can avoid disclosure and public scrutiny as to the basis and reasons for its actions."

1100

You've been in that chair for almost four months and have yet to show any shred of accountability. This is the best place to start. Will you right now, Premier, order your staff to get us the USB sticks and make the information public before they disappear quicker than the hard drives they came from?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Thank you.

Premier?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Government House leader.

Hon. John Milloy: The member talks about documents. Let's talk about documents: 130,000 documents have been provided to the committee, 30,000 of them from the Premier's office.

Let's talk about the Premier's commitment to transparency. When she was made Premier, one of her first actions was asking the Auditor General to look into the Oakville situation. After that, she offered the opposition a select committee to look into the gas plant situation, and they said no, because they wanted to have a witch hunt against a former member. But she wasn't held back by that. She asked me to work with the opposition so that we could broaden the mandate of the committee. She has appeared in front of the committee. She has encouraged staff and ministers to appear in front of the committee. Mr. Speaker, she has been forthcoming. As I said in the previous question, she's been forthcoming with the Information and Privacy Commissioner. She has taken every step to make sure rules are being followed and has asked me to look at how we can strengthen those rules.

COMMITTEE Sittings

Mr. Taras Natyshak: My question is to the Premier. Ontarians want to know why the government wasted over a billion dollars of their money to cancel gas plants. They want to know why the government thought they could get away with destroying key information.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Order.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: Today—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Member from Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound, come to order.

Carry on.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: Today, New Democrats moved that the justice committee keep sitting through the entire summer. Can the Premier explain why the Liberal members voted with the PCs to put their summer vacation plans ahead of getting answers for Ontarians?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Government House leader.

Hon. John Milloy: Mr. Speaker, there's a certain irony in that question. The fact that the committee has full control of its own agenda is because the Premier of this province offered to have a broadened mandate of the committee; that it would, in parliamentary parlance, sit at the call of the Chair.

The Premier has in no way tried to hamper the committee's investigations. She has appeared in front of the committee. Under her watch, we have given 130,000 pages of documents to the committee, including 30,000 from the Premier's office.

The control of the justice committee is in the hands of the members, Mr. Speaker, which I think is a tribute to the transparency of this Premier.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Taras Natyshak: Ontarians deserve answers about the gas plant scandal. New Democrats have called

for an independent public inquiry, but the government has dug in its heels. Then we called for the justice committee to keep sitting through the entire summer, to get down to the answers, but this government joined with the PCs and dug in their heels again. They're more concerned with working on their golf handicap than working to find the truth.

Why did the Liberal members vote against more transparency and against getting Ontarians the answers that they deserve?

Hon. John Milloy: Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure if I'm the only one who finds it amusing that the NDP are now accusing the government of some conspiracy with the PCs to cover up the gas plant situation. I think that's a little bit too rich for this side of the Legislature.

The fact of the matter is that the justice committee, with a broadened mandate, was set up with the support and encouragement of this Premier. We have provided it with 130,000 documents. Those documents have been forthcoming—as requested, have come forward.

We have seen this Premier, when she took office, write a letter to the Auditor General asking him to look into the Oakville situation. We're expecting his report later this summer.

This Premier has gone to great lengths to make sure that our government is as transparent as possible. As I say, going forward, she has asked me, as Minister of Government Services, to see ways that we can strengthen the current laws, as outlined in the IPC's report.

TRANSIT FUNDING

Mr. Lorenzo Berardinetti: My question is for the Minister of Finance. A few weeks ago, there was a passionate debate at Toronto city council about converting the proposed Scarborough LRT into a subway. Many of my constituents in Scarborough Southwest have been trying to convert this project into a subway for some time and have supported this change for many years.

I know that you have recently had correspondence with the federal Minister of Finance, Jim Flaherty, about receiving more funding from the federal government on transit. The province of Ontario has committed \$8.4 billion in capital investments, which is covering the cost of the Eglinton, Scarborough, Sheppard and Finch projects. The federal government has a measly \$330 million—not billion, but million—allocated for the Sheppard project. I can see why this arrangement needs to be updated.

What are the circumstances around which aspects of the Big Move could be revisited?

Hon. Charles Sousa: I would like to thank the member from Scarborough Southwest for his passionate advocacy on this very important issue. Currently, there is no plan to revisit these projects. They're founded on a plan with Metrolinx that is based on legal agreements signed in November with the city of Toronto and the TTC, and they're acting on that plan.

However, it is unfortunate that the federal government has not established a dedicated transit fund. If the federal

government was at the table with their complete share of the funds needed to support transit expansion, then aspects of the Big Move could be revisited. This issue is simply too important for us to take a wait-and-see approach to federal funding when we must act now to address the congestion crisis in the GTHA. Federal infrastructure funding should be flexible so provinces and other partners can maintain a path to fiscal balance and support our economy and community through strategic infrastructure investments.

The governments must be aligned with the federal investment strategy so that these priorities and strategic investments can be had. As you know, I've invited the federal government—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Lorenzo Berardinetti: Thank you, Minister, for providing that update. I agree that it's truly unfortunate that the federal government has not come to the table yet with a national strategy on transit. Other developed countries provide much greater federal funding for transit projects, and Canada is lagging behind its counterparts significantly.

Our government's record on public transit investment is truly something to be proud of. Our budget in 2013 outlines several key investments in public transit that we hope will be passed with the support of all parties in the House. We have stepped up to build transit across the province, and we are already seeing results.

The minister mentioned investments across the GTHA and beyond in public transit. Could the minister update us on the other projects that are part of the 2013 budget plan?

Hon. Charles Sousa: Minister of Transportation.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: I want to be very clear about a few things here. One, we have a memorandum of understanding with the city of Toronto, which they voted for. They voted down subways in Scarborough, and then they changed their mind. Then we went back, and the Premier, when she was Minister of Transportation—with skill that I think could solve the Middle East crisis—renegotiated and brought that back, and we have a deal. We've had a deal not once, but twice.

The door was always open to the federal government to come in. They did it. The city council could come to the federal and provincial governments and say, "We would like another MOU because we would like to add projects, and for the first time, we'd like to write a big cheque."

The federal government could come to us and say, "We would like to join because you're paying 90% of the costs. We don't think that's fair. We think we're being kind of cheap at 5%. We'll come up with maybe 25%, and then anything is possible."

ACCESS TO INFORMATION

Mr. Todd Smith: My question this morning is for the Premier. Premier, this just keeps getting worse and worse every day. I'm sick of watching all the Premier's men

unravel here in the Legislature as this scandal continues to reach further and further into the Liberal organization. Now we've even got the NDP, who are guilty as well of aiding and abetting this criminal activity by continuing to support this government. They're guilty of being an accessory after the fact.

You claim to be innocent. You've used your private Gmail account to discuss the gas plants because you know it wouldn't be subject to freedom of information. We've had your transition chief, Monique Smith, on record insulting the ruling by our Speaker. We've had two senior Liberal chiefs of staff break the law to destroy documents.

Premier, at least when Richard Nixon was breaking the law, he had the decency to resign as the evidence was mounting. He had the decency to resign in that scandal.

1110

Show some respect for the office that you hold. Show some respect for the people of Ontario. Will you call in the OPP today?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. While the clock is stopped, I am going to recognize that this is a heated debate, but I am a little concerned about the direction of the verbiage that's being used to make accusations against members. I would prefer the questions to be directed away from that as much as possible.

Premier.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As I have said a few times in the House, the OPP is an independent entity, and they will do what they deem in the best interests of the people of Ontario.

I have said that since I came into this office, I have worked to make sure that all the information that was asked for was provided. The fact is that the member opposite is talking about an email that he has. It's an email that he has read. It's an email that he has in his hands. Clearly, it's not something that I was trying to keep secret, because he has it in his hands. That is completely consistent with what we have done since I came into this role. We've opened up the process. We've provided the information that was asked for. We will continue to do that.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Todd Smith: Mr. Speaker, the privacy commissioner ruled this week that that Liberal government was guilty of breaking the law. It's as simple as that. Who is the leader of that Liberal government? It's the Premier of the province.

I'm not interested in more talking points, and neither are the people of Ontario. They want to see some real action. I'm interested in the Premier—that's you—finally showing some respect for the office that you hold.

The chief of staff to your predecessor broke the law. The former chief of staff to the Minister of Energy broke the law. Senior members of your team have said in emails that they don't really see any problem with that. They've actually stood up and said that they don't see any problem with breaking the law.

This is about a fundamental breach of trust that you and the senior members of your party and your government have committed against the people of Ontario. Only the OPP's white-collar crime unit can get to the bottom of this scandal. Will you, like Richard Nixon, have to be escorted out of here to make that happen?

Let's get to the bottom of this. Bring in the OPP—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock. Be seated, please.

Premier?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Government House leader.

Hon. John Milloy: Mr. Speaker, I'm very interested in the honourable member's discussion of the use of personal Gmail accounts. They'll want to hear this. I'd like to read an email into the record. It says, "A great opportunity has come up. You've been asked to do Focus Ontario this week. Taping is tomorrow at 2 p.m., and they want to give you the whole show. You'll be on with John Tory and Keith Leslie. The time works for your schedule, so we're going to book it in, and you've got some time before that to do a bit of prep." It's signed by Lynette Harris, executive assistant to the Leader of the Opposition.

The most interesting thing: It's sent to the Leader of the Opposition at his Gmail account.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): New question.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Order. Order, please. This is the time in which you don't know whether or not I'm going to take another step if it gets quiet and you decide you're going to interject.

New question.

LONG-TERM CARE

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: My question is to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care.

Speaker, in London and Middlesex county, 68%, or 15 out of 22, long-term-care homes have not had an annual resident quality inspection. The minister's response has been extremely concerning, implying that complaints or critical incident investigations can take the place of thorough and preventive inspections.

Will the minister acknowledge that the 15 homes in Middlesex county investigated for complaints and critical incidents should still get a full inspection so that further tragedies can be prevented?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Speaker, what I can tell you is that I completely agree that when people are in long-term-care homes they and their loved ones ought to have confidence in the quality of care that is being delivered in those long-term-care homes.

We are significantly strengthening the inspection protocol. Since 2010, our inspections are much more thorough and they are resident-focused.

Is there more to do? Yes, I believe there is more to do, and I am exploring what those options might be.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: Speaker, some long-term-care homes in London have more than two dozen investigations following a complaint or critical incident. The frequency of these complaint investigations might point to an underlying problem, but still, the minister has not taken the time to do a full inspection.

Seniors in long-term care and their families want problems resolved before they turn to tragedy. Will the minister tell these families when full inspections of all long-term-care homes will be completed?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Well, Speaker, I think it is important to note that every home does receive an inspection every year. In fact, last year the ministry undertook 2,347 inspections. That's an average of 3.7 inspections per home.

I think it's also important to talk about the real improvements in quality that are happening in our long-term-care homes since the introduction and implementation of our new long-term-care act.

I'll just speak about one home, Leisureworld Tullamore: a 50% reduction in critical incidents because of the work that's been done through Behavioural Supports Ontario. The behaviours are decreasing because staff are better trained to know how to deal with people who have significant behavioural challenges.

Improving the quality of care is the highest priority in our long-term-care homes. Inspections are part of that. As I said before, we are looking at how to even further strengthen those long-term-care inspections.

LABOUR DISPUTE

Ms. Dipika Damerla: My question is for the Minister of Labour. Speaker, my riding of Mississauga East-Cooksville has a large number of high-rises and so the ongoing elevator strike is of issue, and I've been getting quite a few emails and calls from concerned constituents. Here's an example of a concern a constituent emailed to me: "There are three elevators in the building of 30 floors and only one elevator is operational. There's a message saying the technicians are on strike. I, as a homemaker, am asking for your assistance in solving this very severe issue."

Can the Minister of Labour give us an update on the negotiations that are taking place?

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: I want to thank the member for a very important question. I do sympathize with the concern that her constituent has raised. I have received, obviously, similar emails from my constituency. I'm sure other members have as well.

This is definitely an issue that impacts all Ontarians. I want to assure the House that the Ministry of Labour is quite engaged. In fact, a Ministry of Labour mediator has met with both parties on 10 different occasions, and is available to assist the parties at the bargaining table whenever requested.

We urge both parties to come back to the table and resume negotiations. I'm very confident that by working together, the parties will be able to reach a settlement,

and we know settlements reached at the negotiating tables are the best ones and the sustainable ones.

I also understand, Speaker, that repairs can continue by qualified TSSA-certified personnel, which various buildings in our constituencies can avail themselves of.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Dipika Damerla: Thank you to the minister for his update on how the negotiations are going, as well as for clarifying that while the strike is on, elevators can continue to be repaired.

I'd just like some clarification on behalf of my constituents as to how they would know whether an elevator repair person is a certified, licensed repair person while the strike is going on.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Minister of Consumer Services.

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: First, I want to inform all members of the House that it is the responsibility of building management and the owners to work with service providers to repair the elevators. In the interest of protecting public safety, the Technical Standards and Safety Authority, the TSSA, requires that only certified and qualified technicians work to repair the elevators.

1120

Currently, there are managers, supervisors and other certified personnel who have the required certifications to work on elevators. So repairs are being done; however, not as quickly as many would like, of course.

With regard to emergency situations, buildings have their own plans to respond to situations with emergency responders. It's important to note that the TSSA has zero tolerance for situations where uncertified, unqualified personnel are found to be working on elevators. I'm monitoring this very closely, and the TSSA and myself will act on public safety risks—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. New question.

WIND TURBINES

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: My question today is for the Premier. Premier, I'm going to quote from your throne speech this past February:

"Your government intends to work with municipalities on other issues, too...."

"So that local populations are involved from the beginning if there is going to be a gas plant or a casino or a wind plant or a quarry...."

Premier, I'm now going to quote you and quote 104.9 The Beach, from Goderich, this past Saturday: "During a visit to Sarnia Friday, Premier Wynne," when asked about the May 30 announcement, "told reporters that municipalities who have made such declarations" of unwilling host communities "are likely out of luck."

Premier, your attitude toward rural Ontario is criminal but, sadly, that's become the norm of your government, I'm afraid. Going back to unwilling host communities who have declared in writing that they're unwilling, Premier, I have to ask you: Do you or do you not support these municipalities?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Energy.

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: Of course, it's always best for parties to work co-operatively with municipalities. I have a tremendous example of one right here, and this is from the member from Nipissing, when he was mayor. Perhaps we should take his lead and municipalities might take his lead:

"Taking advantage of locally available green power resources is a good fit with the long-range development strategy we have for the community. I am particularly pleased with the relationship we have struck with West Wind Development, Inc. for the first half of the project. I am confident that the company's reputation as a responsible wind power developer can put North Bay 'on the map' as a showcase for the sensitive and responsible development of this great renewable energy resource."

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: Minister, you and I both know that's nothing but a load of spin.

Back to the Premier: Municipalities know your support is fair-weather. Proponents that I have met with, municipalities, and all of us in the PC caucus are wondering why last week's announcement was made before your MPP working group had actually even gotten together and presented the recommendations as reported in August.

Premier, it's an insult to rural Ontario. Municipalities thought that they could expect better from you. You told them they could. But you instead think you can fool them with this announcement, and actually they know better. They're very savvy now. They know it means nothing. Who did your working group consult with? Because I can tell you, no one in my riding heard from anybody. Because of that, Premier, will you invite opposition like myself and other members impacted by industrial wind turbines to join your working group so we can do the right thing?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Thank you.

Minister of Energy.

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: Mr. Speaker, I assure you that the decibel level doesn't necessarily create any more substance to the reality of the situation. Communities spoke—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Leeds-Grenville will come to order. I'm going to ask that all members allow the answer to be put.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): If the member from Leeds-Grenville is looking for a warning, he's got one. You are warned.

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: Mr. Speaker, communities spoke, mayors spoke, and we listened. We listened; we consulted with the Association of Municipalities of Ontario in a very significant way. We listened to stakeholders.

With these large renewable projects, the Ontario Power Authority is creating a new bidding process where priority approval is given to projects that have prior municipal approval, making it extremely difficult, if not

impossible, for contracts to be awarded without an arrangement with a municipality.

In addition to that, we're creating funds for small and medium-sized municipalities so that they can create municipal energy plans, and we're creating more taxation availability for municipalities that have wind turbines. It's very significant and—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. New question.

PROTECTION FOR WORKERS

Mr. Taras Natyshak: My question is to the Minister of Labour. Minister, on Tuesday, 400 retirees of National Auto Rad in Windsor learned that they will lose their health and life insurance benefits. The reason is that the employer is filing for bankruptcy and has cleverly manipulated things so that all liquidated assets will be going to another company, a sister company—get this—owned by the same family that owns National Auto Rad.

Why is this government doing nothing when 400 loyal Windsor retirees are being stripped of their hard-earned health benefits by an unscrupulous employer?

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: I thank the member opposite for bringing this issue to my attention. Obviously, it seems like it's a matter between a union and its employer, and I obviously encourage the union and the employer to work together to be able to come to some sort of a settlement.

We always encourage parties to negotiate these types of things around the negotiating table; that's where the best results are created, so I encourage the company and the union to work together and be able to work in agreement. If they need the assistance of the Ministry of Labour's mediators, we will provide those services to facilitate an agreement.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Taras Natyshak: Minister, this isn't a one-off. This is just one of many stories of employers exploiting loopholes in federal and provincial law to deny workers wages and benefits that they are rightfully owed. In January, Vertis Communications in Fort Erie—and I know you're familiar with this—announced that it was shutting down, filing for bankruptcy in the States and leaving 100 employees with no jobs and no severance.

The callous treatment of workers such as those at Vertis and National Auto Rad is wrong and simply has to stop. When will this government finally take action to ensure that loyal workers like those in Windsor and Niagara get the wages and benefits that are rightfully theirs?

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: The issues that the member speaks of are federal issues. In fact, I have written to the federal Minister of Labour to encourage her to ensure that they enhance their worker protection and employment protection program, the Wage Earner Protection Program. This is an issue that the federal government has to deal with to ensure that, in the matter of Vertis—which the member from Niagara Falls so aptly advocated for—and in this particular issue, the federal government extend

wage earner protection to those who are beyond just a bankruptcy situation.

I look forward to working with the member on this. I've written to the Minister of Labour federally, and I will continue to urge her to provide the protection that Ontario workers so much deserve.

STUDENT ASSISTANCE

Mr. Grant Crack: My question is to the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities. This is an important time of year for high school students across the province. Many have already been accepted at post-secondary institutions for the coming fall term. Also, many students already in college or university have travelled home for the summer to be with their family and their friends.

Ontario has world-class institutions across this province, and some students, like the ones in my riding of Glengarry-Prescott-Russell, need to travel a distance to attend college and/or university. Commuting from a great distance can be difficult, frustrating and, at times, time-consuming. However, some students have no choice but to commute, and I can understand the frustrations that they face.

Speaker, through you to the minister, can the minister inform the House about the opportunities that post-secondary students have when they commute to school?

Hon. Brad Duguid: That member is a strong voice for students across the province that do have long distances to travel to post-secondary education. We're very proud of the fact that Ontario has the best colleges and universities in the world. Each and every student that's qualified should be free to choose which institution they'd like to attend, regardless of the distance.

Ontario Distance Grants assist OSAP-eligible students from remote and rural Ontario areas with their transportation costs. The commuting grant provides \$500 per term to students who commute on a regular basis 80 kilometres or more and there's no post-secondary institution near their home. The travel grant provides \$300 a year to single dependent students who live away from home during the study period and their parents' home is 80 kilometres or more from the closest institution.

1130

Time with family and friends is important. Commuting can be time-consuming and financially difficult. Our government is providing the tools to make this easier for our students.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Grant Crack: Thank you for that great response from the minister. It's great to see that our government is making post-secondary education more affordable and more accessible.

Students in my riding of Glengarry-Prescott-Russell often study full-time in French, and they have to travel to various colleges and universities across the province. Access to francophone studies is important to many students that I speak with and are dedicated to pursuing their degrees in French. I'm pleased to hear this, but once

again, commuting and travelling to appropriate institutions can form a barrier for many students.

Speaker, through you to the minister, could he provide us with an update on what the government is doing to assist francophone students who need to travel to college or university?

Hon. Brad Duguid: That is a question that our minister responsible for francophone affairs speaks to me about very often. Francophone students deserve a supportive learning environment that allows them to study and succeed in their own language. We recognize the importance of providing francophone students in Ontario with a broader range of post-secondary options for study.

Beginning in 2013-14, eligible francophone students who are attending full-time studies in French will be eligible for both the commuting grant and the travel grant, even if there is another institution closer to home. This expanded eligibility criteria supports accessibility of French-language post-secondary studies in Ontario.

Our government is committed to providing the best post-secondary education in the world. This grant is just one way that we're doing that. I want to thank the minister for francophone affairs for her continual championing of these important issues on behalf of francophone students.

SCHOOL TRANSPORTATION

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: My question is to the Premier. With your new tendering policy, your government is destroying independent school bus operators. Shortly after you became Premier, I wrote to your education minister to demand a change. I've sent countless emails for constituents whose livelihoods are at stake and met with the Minister of Rural Affairs. You ignored recommendations by former Integrity Commissioner Coulter Osborne, who said you got it wrong. He showed you a better, fair path, and you've lost a court case that said your decisions were wrong.

Premier, how many court decisions will it take and how many lost jobs will it take before you admit your policy has failed?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: The Minister of Education.

Hon. Liz Sandals: The member opposite is referring to an area which has clearly been difficult, and because this has been a difficult area, we have met with both the Ontario School Bus operators and also the Independent School Bus Operators, because we now have a situation where there are two competing organizations representing operators. What we have said to both of those organizations is that we're willing to work with them and look at the procurement practices and make sure that the RFP practices are well-refined, that they're clear and that they're clear to everybody who is bidding. But I must make it clear that the Auditor General has given us direction that we do need to have a fair and open procurement process.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary? The member from Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound.

Mr. Bill Walker: Thank you, Speaker. My question is to the Premier. Premier, if you were putting students first, you would be putting their safety first. Both the task force that Coulter Osborne chaired and the Ontario Chamber of Commerce talked about the benefits of independent school bus operators. Like them, I know the best interests of our rural school communities are when local operators who know their student populations serve our schools. Your actions prove you disagree with that.

Will you put our students first and will you restore integrity in student transportation by letting our small, independent operators compete?

Hon. Liz Sandals: I repeat, we have met with Karen Cameron, representing the Independent School Bus Operators, and we've met with the Ontario School Bus Association, and we have said to both of them that we are willing to have a look at how the procurement policies are defined. But I think it is also important that we know that when we look at the data around who has been successful in procuring contracts, contrary to some of the reports we have heard, the number of small operators has actually gone up. If you look at the experience across the province, the number of contracts that have gone to the smaller operators has actually increased.

AIR-RAIL LINK

Mr. Jonah Schein: My question is to the Minister of Transportation. Yesterday, scientist David Suzuki added his voice to the growing list of people critical of the Liberal government's plan to run diesel trains along the air-rail link. Suzuki's concerns echo those of transit expert Joell Ann Vanderwagen, who recently called the Liberals' diesel plan "the worst current example of wasted resources and opportunity." She calls electric train service a "common sense" alternative "to create a GTA-wide rapid transit network now—not 30 years down the road."

Speaker, will the minister admit that this diesel line is a bad plan and finally commit to immediate electrification of the Union Pearson Express?

Hon. Glen R. Murray: You know, Mr. Speaker, the more I listen to the third party, the more confused I am by their priorities. Big priority number one: Make it cheaper to drive a car. Big priority number two I don't understand because we both share a challenging set of constituencies along the Lakeshore line, where right now we're not running Tier 4 diesel, which is 25% of emissions. The trains that ran along Ontario's tracks for the last 70 years have been diesel. As someone who represents people who live half a block from the CN and CPR main lines, where diesel is commonplace, their health with conventional diesel seems to be a lower priority for the members when we've already committed to doing electrification by 2017.

When is one of the six New Democrats who represent people along the diesel-infested lines, as they might call them, going to—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

Mr. Jonah Schein: I just don't understand why this government would move ahead with more diesel transit investment at this point. Let's be very clear: As New Democrats, we believe in transit investment. We're committed to it. We know we need to pay for it in fair ways. But we also believe in smart transit investment.

The Auditor General has criticized this government's diesel power plan. He says higher fares will drive down what he says are "overly optimistic" ridership projections on this line. Instead, an electrified line would allow multiple stops, it would generate higher ridership, it would be more affordable, and it would serve as a downtown relief line for the west end. Let's talk about this line, Minister.

So, one last time: Will the minister commit to do it once, to do it right the first time and to electrify the Union-Pearson air-rail link from day one?

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: Mr. Speaker, I'm going to say this very slowly. We are doing it. The EA is under way. It's for 2017. The e-environmental process doesn't allow us to do it now because it won't be ready for the Pan Am Games, which would be an embarrassment, and we're pretty proud of the Pan Am Games.

I'm still confused. We could take \$900 million right now out of what? Twenty northern highways? How would the third party feel about that?

When is the third party going to demand, in Ottawa or here, a national transit strategy? When are they going to show concern about getting conventional diesel on the CN and CPR lines electrified, which we can only do with the federal party? When will Mr. Mulcair say the word "electrification" of a national transit policy? They had a chance when we were in power to support a national transit policy and they sided with the party there, then cancelled it.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: Mr. Speaker, electrification—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

There are no deferred votes. This House stands recessed until 1 p.m.

The House recessed from 1139 to 1300.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Ms. Helena Jaczek: We are just about to be joined by some guests in the east members' gallery. We have Vish Date, Mrs. Swati Date, Ann Tran and Stephane Cadieux. They're all representing badminton in Markham.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Welcome.

Mr. John O'Toole: I'd like to recognize—in the chamber earlier today, there was Ruth Wilcock, who's the executive director of the Brain Injury Association, who put on a wonderful thing earlier today. Welcome to Queen's Park.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Further introductions? The member from—

Mr. Frank Klees: Newmarket-Aurora.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I know. I'm holding back. This is fun. Newmarket-Aurora.

Mr. Frank Klees: Speaker, I want to welcome all of my constituents from Newmarket-Aurora who are watching these proceedings on the parliamentary channel.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): That could have been why I forgot.

Last call for introductions—especially that one.

It is now time for members' statements.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

FIRST RESPONDERS

Mrs. Jane McKenna: Today, I have tabled a motion designed to offer a formal and lasting tribute to this province's fallen emergency medical services first responders. The resolution reads, "That, in the opinion of this House, the government should establish a memorial to emergency medical services first responders whose lives are lost in the line of duty."

Such memorials currently exist in the Queen's Park precinct to honour firefighters and police who have died in the line of duty. It is time that we honour fallen first responders as well, Speaker. If passed, this resolution would constitute a request to erect a memorial to Ontario paramedics, land and air, in the Queen's Park precinct.

First responders' skill and dedication often makes the difference between life and death. When a paramedic's life is lost in service to the public, that should be properly honoured.

This initiative is inspired by a request from John Snowball, father of Burlington paramedic Chris Snowball. Chris was tragically killed in the Ornge air ambulance crash last week. John asked that his son and all paramedics who have perished in service be memorialized so that they will be remembered by this and future generations as heroes.

I could not agree more, Speaker, and I am proud to table this motion in the Ontario Legislature today.

ITALIAN HERITAGE MONTH

Mr. Steven Del Duca: I am extremely pleased today to be able to rise in the House and convey my most sincere thanks and congratulations to those celebrating Italian Heritage Month here in Ontario this June.

As some of you will know from comments I have made previously in this House, my own father, Ben Del Duca, immigrated to Canada from Italy in 1958, and his father, my grandfather, Alfonso Del Duca, came from Italy to Ontario in, I believe, 1951. Therefore, this month is of particular importance to me and to my family.

I'm also very proud to say that my community of Vaughan has what I believe is the largest concentration of Italian Canadians of any one electoral district not just in the province of Ontario but the entire country of Canada residing within its boundaries. So throughout the

month of June, people from all over Ontario will be celebrating and recognizing the Italian-Canadian community's contribution.

Ontario is home to over 1.3 million Italian Canadians. Since the 1880s, this community has made, and continues to make, significant contributions to both the growth and prosperity of our province and our country.

I look forward to attending a number of cultural events occurring in my riding of Vaughan over the course of this month in celebration of the Italian-Canadian community. In fact, just a number of days ago, as you will know, Speaker, and as many others will know, we did the official flag-raising on the front lawn here at Queen's Park, and just this past Tuesday, my own city of Vaughan did the official flag-raising at Vaughan city hall.

Once again, I want to congratulate and send my best to all of those celebrating Italian Heritage Month in the province of Ontario this June.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Bravo. Grazie.

CAMBRIDGE STREET BAPTIST CHURCH

Ms. Laurie Scott: Last Saturday, I had the honour of attending an event marking the 150th anniversary of the congregation of the Cambridge Street Baptist Church in Lindsay. A hundred and fifty years ago, a tiny congregation of 13 devout members started to lay the foundations of what has since become an institution in this community. When the Lindsay church was first organized in 1863, there were fewer than 40 Baptist churches in the entire province of Ontario. When the chapel was first built, the pastor would bring his own organ to the church by wheelbarrow in the summer and by sled in the winter.

The 150-year history of the church has been well documented, and a detailed and comprehensive summary of key milestones is included on its website. It's a fascinating document, listing everything from the names of the first three people ever baptized there to biographical information on the various pastors over the period, the eventual purchase of the pipe organ, and the burning of the mortgage in 1946.

From its humble beginnings in 1863, the Cambridge Street Baptist Church has grown to become a place of joy, worship and community for the thousands of people who have belonged to the congregation over its 150 years. I was pleased to have been invited to participate in this momentous anniversary, and I would like to extend congratulations to the current congregation and wish them the very best for another 150 successful years in the Lindsay area.

ANNIVERSARY OF ATTACK ON THE GOLDEN TEMPLE

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: This week marks the 29-year anniversary of the Indian government's attack on the Harmandir Sahib, which is called the Golden Temple, in Amritsar. Twenty-nine years ago, the Indian government

ordered its attack on the Golden Temple and close to 50 other Sikh places of worship, in a systematic and organized manner.

India's Supreme Court judge Justice V.M. Tarkunde, in describing the June 1984 attack, said, "It was indeed a mass massacre mostly of innocents." S.M. Sikri, former Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of India, elaborates by describing Operation Bluestar as a "massive, deliberate and planned onslaught to the life, property and honour of a comparatively small, but easily identifiable minority community."

The attack on the Golden Temple, contrary to misinformation, had nothing whatsoever to do with a Hindu-Sikh conflict, as there was categorically no Hindu-Sikh conflict. In fact, in the years preceding the attack, the Sikh community rallied together calling for the implementation of the Anandpur Sahib Resolution, which called for increased rights for oppressed minorities, women, lower castes and impoverished communities, and asked for increased autonomy for the state and guarantees of constitutional rights and equalities for citizens, regardless of their caste, religion or gender.

This attack was a severe mark on the history of India; it has left untold wounds across the country and across many Sikh community members. I call on this Legislature to remember these attacks and to call for justice once and for all, because injustice against one is injustice against all.

My deepest sympathies are with those who lost their lives and their family members to this devastating attack, and I call again on all of us in this House to remember those devastating attacks and that injustice that occurred so that we can never let that happen again.

ORDRE DE LA PLÉIADE

M. Phil McNeely: J'ai assisté, le 29 mai dernier, à la cérémonie de remise des décorations de l'Ordre de la Pléiade, section Ontario, ici même à l'Assemblée législative. Mes collègues la députée d'Ottawa-Vanier et ministre des Affaires francophones, Madeleine Meilleur, et le député de GPR, Grant Crack, étaient aussi présents à la célébration.

Cet ordre a été créé par l'Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie en 1976. Il est destiné à reconnaître les mérites de femmes et d'hommes qui se sont particulièrement distingués en servant les idéaux de coopération et d'amitié de la francophonie en Ontario.

L'Ordre de la Francophonie et du dialogue des cultures reconnaît chaque année six Ontariennes ou Ontariens pour s'être démarquées de façon exceptionnelle par leur contribution à faire rayonner la langue française. Cette distinction marque ainsi les efforts et l'apport indéniables de ces individus à la promotion de la culture française dans leur communauté respective mais aussi au niveau de la francophonie partout en Ontario.

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Je suis donc honoré de féliciter devant cette Chambre les six récipiendaires du grade de Chevalier de l'Ordre de

la Pléiade 2013. Il s'agit du major à la retraite Élizabeth Allard d'Orléans, Maryse Baillaigé de Windsor, Jean-Luc Bernard de Mississauga, Peter Hominuk de Limoges, Gérard Paraghiamian de Toronto et Linda Savard d'Ottawa. Félicitations une fois de plus. Vous êtes des symboles pour les générations qui suivent.

D-DAY ANNIVERSARY

Mr. Robert Bailey: I stand today on the 69th anniversary of D-Day, in honour of the 14,000 men of the 3rd Canadian Infantry Division and the 2nd Canadian Armoured Brigade.

In the early morning hours of June 6, 1944, with great courage and boldness, those men stormed the near impassable barrier of Hitler's Atlantic wall. That day, as part of the Allied forces effort, some 130,000 troops landed on the shores of Normandy.

At Juno Beach, the tenacity of Canadian troops quickly overwhelmed the surprised Nazi forces. In doing so, our troops helped to establish an 80-kilometre beachhead with Allied forces, a turning point that would lead to the eventual defeat of Germany in the Second World War.

In June 2011, I had the opportunity to travel to Juno Beach and visit that hallowed ground. I stood on the sands where those brave young Canadians ferociously fought their way through the killing zone of German artillery and where 344 soldiers made the ultimate sacrifice by giving their lives in the fight to liberate Europe.

Mr. Speaker, I ask today, as we tend to the business of our individual lives, that each of us reflect upon the past service and sacrifice of our veterans in all conflicts, and that we give thanks for their determination and commitment to protecting our traditions of freedom, justice and democracy.

FEDERATION OF BADMINTON CLUBS

Ms. Helena Jacek: Today I'd like to recognize the Federation of Badminton Clubs, from my great riding of Oak Ridges—Markham.

The Federation of Badminton Clubs, whose motto is United We Play, was founded by President Philip Chow in 2011. It acts as an umbrella organization for the 49 badminton clubs in the Markham area and was recently awarded an Ontario Trillium grant worth over \$200,000. The grant will go towards purchasing new equipment such as custom racquets for younger children and youth, the hiring of a technical director, and the ability for coaches to get their National Coaching Certification Program designation.

In fact, the federation has been so successful at promoting badminton that they are now facing the enviable challenge of finding space to meet the demand. As a result, they are working with the community to ensure that the Markham Pan Am Centre, which will host the badminton events for the 2015 Pan Am Games, will remain dedicated to badminton.

We are joined today by Vish Date, a two-time gold medal winner at the US senior Olympic badminton championships and a gold medal winner at both the Ontario and World Masters tournaments; Ann Tran, a VP from the Federation of Badminton Clubs and a bronze medal winner for women's doubles at the Ontario Colleges Athletic Association championships; and Stephane Cadieux from Badminton Ontario, who is Canada's junior team's coach. Thank you for the work that you've done to build such a strong badminton community in Markham.

BOOTS AND HEARTS COUNTRY MUSIC FESTIVAL

Mr. John O'Toole: The countdown is on for the 2013 Boots and Hearts country music festival in Clarington from August 1 to 4. This is the largest country music festival of its kind ever hosted on Canadian soil. I'd like to thank the minister for supporting that program.

Exciting new performers, as well as global superstars, are all part of a lineup of more than 30 bands, including Miranda Lambert, winner of four American country music awards for 2013.

The Boots and Hearts stage will also welcome Jason Aldean, the Band Perry, Rascal Flatts, Dierks Bentley, Joe Diffie and Dean Brody.

Canadian performers include the Stone Sparrows from Clarington, Brooklin's Lindsay Broughton, Emerson Drive, the Stellas, Jason Blaine, and High Valley.

I would like to commend Shannon McNevan, a young entrepreneur from Peterborough, and his team at Republic Live for launching Boots and Hearts last year. The festival builds on last year's great success.

I'm proud to say that my riding is home to this four-day country music celebration. I hope to attend. I'd like to invite the members, their families, and friends of the Canadian Tire Motorsport raceway for a great time this summer and a great weekend in country music. Everyone is welcome, of course.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Vaughan on a point of order.

Mr. Steven Del Duca: My apologies for doing this, Mr. Speaker. The guests I'm going to acknowledge weren't in the gallery when we were going through introduction of guests. I'd like to acknowledge that I have some guests here from St. Gregory the Great elementary school in Woodbridge, in my wonderful riding of Vaughan, who I had a chance to meet and speak with down on the main staircase. They're here. I think it's three—I'm not sure if all three are here, but three grade 5 classes. I know they've been having a fantastic time and they will agree by now, as I told them on the steps right here today, that this place is more exciting than Canada's Wonderland.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I believe we've missed a rotation that I thought was there. But let me make a point while we're all attentive. There is sometimes a habit of some people saying, "Take the next

rotation." I don't want to say it's a game of chicken, but it's, "I want to wait and see if I can get the last word." If you miss the rotation, you could also miss all statements if no one else stands up. I want to make sure everyone realizes it's always rotation but not necessarily rotation. If somebody's late or they can't make it and someone is nice enough to take the rotation and pick it up, that's absolutely fine. I just wanted to point out, that if that game gets played, it could lose all statements. So try to be cognizant of that as we go through.

At this point, I will recognize the member from Toronto—Danforth on a statement.

GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSIONS

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Thank you very much, Speaker, and thank you for your comments on the timing of statements.

Yesterday, the Environmental Commissioner of Ontario presented his report about greenhouse gas emissions and Ontario's failure to actually move forward on taking action on climate change. He spoke eloquently about the inadequacy of the measures that have been taken. I note that the world has passed a threshold in the concentration of greenhouse gas in the atmosphere, a threshold that should seize the attention of every jurisdiction around the world for its implications.

This week, we are seeing massive flooding in eastern and central Europe, unprecedented in a half a thousand years. We've seen tornados in Oklahoma that have destroyed homes and destroyed lives—one of which was recorded as one of the widest ever seen, over four kilometres wide.

Speaker, we are facing disruption of our everyday life, of our civilization on this planet. Failure of this government and others to act will mean that we will deal with the consequences, not with the opportunities, of that challenge before us.

I call on all members of the Legislature to read the words of the Environmental Commissioner, look at what is possible to be done and act to make sure that our future has some guarantees, some safeguarding in it.

D-DAY ANNIVERSARY

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Sarnia—Lambton on a point of order.

Mr. Robert Bailey: Speaker, I'd like to ask the House for unanimous consent, this being the 69th anniversary of D-Day, for a moment of silence in memory of those veterans who gave the ultimate.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member for Sarnia—Lambton has asked for unanimous consent to observe a moment's silence on the anniversary of D-Day. Do I have agreement? Agreed.

All members and guests stand, please.

The House observed a moment's silence.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I thank everyone.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON REGULATIONS AND PRIVATE BILLS

Mr. Peter Tabuns: I beg leave to present the first report, 2013, from the Standing Committee on Regulations and Private Bills and move adoption of its recommendations.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Mr. Tabuns presents the committee's report and moves the adoption of its recommendations. Does the member have a short statement?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: No further statement. I move adjournment of the debate.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Mr. Tabuns moves adjournment of the debate. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Debate adjourned.

1320

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

WASTE REDUCTION ACT, 2013 LOI DE 2013 SUR LA RÉDUCTION DES DÉCHETS

Mr. Bradley moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 91, An Act to establish a new regime for the reduction, reuse and recycling of waste and to repeal the Waste Diversion Act, 2002 / Projet de loi 91, Loi créant un nouveau cadre pour la réduction, la réutilisation et le recyclage des déchets et abrogeant la Loi de 2002 sur le réacheminement des déchets.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member for a short statement.

Hon. James J. Bradley: Mr. Speaker, I'll make my statement during the time allocated for ministerial statements.

ENSURING LOCAL VOICES IN NEW CASINO GAMBLING DEVELOPMENT ACT, 2013

LOI DE 2013 VISANT À GARANTIR LA CONSULTATION DES POPULATIONS LOCALES AVANT LA CRÉATION DE NOUVEAUX CASINOS

Mr. McNaughton moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 92, An Act to amend the Ontario Lottery and Gaming Corporation Act, 1999 / Projet de loi 92, Loi

modifiant la Loi de 1999 sur la Société des loteries et des jeux de l'Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member for a short statement.

Mr. Monte McNaughton: I'm pleased to rise to introduce my bill, the former Bill 76, Ensuring Local Voices in New Casino Gambling Development Act. Accordingly, this bill amends the Ontario Lottery and Gaming Corporation Act, 1999, to adopt by reference the rule set out in the current regulations made under the act that a casino or charity casino cannot be established in a municipality or on a First Nation reserve unless the electors in the municipality or the members of the council, as the case may be, approve the establishment by way of a referendum.

I encourage all members to support this important piece of legislation.

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

WASTE DIVERSION

Hon. James J. Bradley: I rise to introduce the Waste Reduction Act. If passed by the Legislature, this legislation would replace the existing Waste Diversion Act. We need the proposed Waste Reduction Act to break the recycling logjam, boost diversion rates and establish a system that encourages the private sector to invest more in recycling plants and jobs in our province.

We have heard loud and clear from the Environmental Commissioner of Ontario, from both opposition parties and from stakeholders in the recycling system that the old legislation is fatally flawed. There's consensus that we need a new approach to increase recycling to better protect our environment.

Under the old law, recycling rates are stagnant at 25%. Under the old law, businesses and institutions are not pulling their weight on recycling. Under the old law, municipal taxpayers are subsidizing blue box recycling. The bottom line is this: Under the old law, every year, millions of tonnes of potential raw materials for our factories are being buried in landfill instead of being recycled back into the economy.

This legislation is designed to get recycling back on track. The cornerstone of the proposed act is ensuring individual producers take responsibility for the end-of-life management of products they sell.

The goal of our proposed legislation is to recycle much more of the 12 million tonnes of waste we produce in this province each year. While residents have embraced recycling, and are diverting 46% of household waste, Ontario's industrial, commercial and institutional sector has stalled at about 13%.

The plan would kick-start recycling in shopping malls, universities and other institutional, commercial and industrial companies, starting with paper and packaging.

More recycling means more jobs. When we recycle another 1,000 tonnes of waste, seven new jobs are created. To look at it another way, recycling a given amount of waste generates 10 times the jobs that disposal in landfill does.

And there's another benefit: The more waste we recycle, the longer landfill capacity lasts, so fewer new ones would be required across the province.

The proposed act would recognize the important role that municipalities and property taxpayers play in recycling waste. The act would lift the 50% producer funding cap on blue box costs so that over time, producers would pay more. The act would transform Waste Diversion Ontario into a strong Waste Reduction Authority with compliance, oversight and enforcement powers.

An early task for the new authority would be to work with municipalities and producers to move more blue box funding off the municipal tax base and over to producers, who should rightly bear more of these costs.

The authority would also be responsible for ensuring a timely transition of existing mandatory recycling cartels to an individual producer responsibility system. The Waste Reduction Authority would monitor progress to be sure producers meet their targets and that diversion rates improve across Ontario.

The legislation would also require all-in pricing. The advertised and shelf price of a product that is designated for recycling under the act would have to include any recycling costs as it would any other cost of doing business. There would not be any surprise at the checkout counter. This move will also incent companies to look for ways to make the recycling processes more economical and stay competitive.

As you know, I think recycling is just another cost of doing business and should not appear on a sales slip. You do not see a special charge for labour costs, rent or heat. Why should you see a separate charge for recycling? That is a question consumers may wish to ask those who have been charging them.

Under the proposed law, misrepresentation of recycling costs would be an offence. The Waste Reduction Authority would have the power to audit the accuracy of any claimed recycling costs and to take action if there is misrepresentation of these costs.

The proposed act draws on significant stakeholder consultations. These proposals are in line with many of the things that the opposition parties, in fact, have been asking for. Both opposition parties have expressed support for individual producer responsibility. Both have noted that greater oversight of the industry recycling programs is needed. Both have asked for internalization of recycling costs by producers. Both have said that industrial, commercial, institutional waste must be addressed. Our legislation would do these things.

I think we have a lot of common ground, Mr. Speaker, and I urge my colleagues in the House to support this legislation.

PREMIER'S AWARDS FOR EXCELLENCE IN THE ARTS

Hon. Michael Chan: Speaker, I was listening to the honourable member talk about today, June 6, D-Day of the landing in Normandy. I actually had the fortune, in 1997, of visiting the beach in Normandy. I still can remember those deserted bunkers and also those big cannons lying around in 1997. I can only imagine, on that day 69 years ago, how bloody it was in the area.

1330

On behalf of the government, I'm pleased to take this opportunity to recognize 12 remarkable Ontario artists and arts organizations. Speaker, 2013 marks the seventh year of the Premier's Awards for Excellence in the Arts, which celebrate artists and arts organizations for innovation and creativity.

The passion our province's artists bring to their work inspires people across Ontario to participate in the extraordinary cultural life of our community. Artists, and the arts organizations that showcase and support them, make unique contributions to Ontario. Not only do they entertain and enlighten us; they also inspire us to innovate and attract talent to the province.

Recognizing Ontario's artists and investing in talent is part of our government's plan to strengthen the economy and build a fair society. We understand the relationship between the arts and our quality of life. We also know the very real value of the arts to our economy.

That's why we are proud to partner with talented artists and arts organizations across the province to build a thriving cultural sector. Arts and culture build vibrant and creative communities, sharpen our competitive advantage, spur economic growth, and create a stronger Ontario.

Mr. Speaker, arts and culture is one of Ontario's fastest-growing sectors. Ontario is home to about 57,000 professional artists and countless arts organizations. The creative sector these professionals work in contributes almost \$20 billion to our economy and employs more than 250,000 people.

Since 2003, creative-industry jobs have increased by 15%, representing 39,000 new jobs in Ontario. The men and women working in creative industries are vital to Ontario. They are key to a creative and innovative knowledge-based economy. That's why Ontario's 2014 budget renewed the government's commitment to the province's creative sector by proposing a new Ontario music fund and continued funding for educational programs at the Canadian film development centre, among other programs.

Our government is proud to support and recognize artists for their important contribution. This is why our government created the Premier's Awards for Excellence in the Arts. It is a way for us to salute these extraordinary accomplishments.

Today, I am proud to shine the light on our finalists, whose passion and creativity reflect the best in Ontario's arts and culture sector. An expert jury chosen by

Ontario Arts Council awards office evaluated the candidates and selected 12 finalists.

Our finalists in the individual artist category are: conductor Lydia Adams, visual artist Iain Baxter&, musician Jane Bennett, writer Charlie Foran, visual artist Micah Lexier, and visual and media artist Shelley Niro.

Our finalists in the arts organization category are: Authors at Harbourfront Centre, the Blyth Festival, Definitely Superior Art Gallery, book publisher Prise de parole, arts educators SKETCH Working Arts, and the Toronto Fringe.

Please join me in celebrating and congratulating all those who contribute to the arts, whose work empowers our province and maintains our place on the map as a cultural capital.

The Premier's Awards for Excellence in the Arts celebrate the inspiration and innovation of our artists, whose work enlightens and enriches us. Congratulations to all our finalists.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Statements by ministries?

It's now time for responses.

WASTE DIVERSION

Mr. Michael Harris: I'm pleased to have this opportunity to address the government's proposed Waste Reduction Act. Since the Liberals created the province's first ever eco taxes in 2008, the Ontario PC Party has been demanding that these needless levies be scrapped. We think it's fundamentally unfair that the Liberals have spent the last five years forcing consumers to pick up the tab for recycling tires, electronics, paint cans and batteries by surprising them at the cash register with a sneaky eco tax.

That's why, when I assumed the role of PC environment critic, I went to work on developing a solution that would allow us to scrap eco taxes but would also keep more recyclable materials out of our landfills. In November last year, I presented a bold Conservative plan to better protect our environment, lower costs for businesses, and treat recyclable materials not as waste but as valuable resources that we should recover and recycle into new products.

Under this plan, the Ontario PC Party pledged to scrap eco taxes, get rid of Liberal recycling cartels and put the province's toothless waste diversion watchdog out of its misery. We also said we would continue to build on the success of the blue box program created by the former PC government.

I must say I find it quite surprising that the Liberals have taken a page from our book by promising to kill each and every Liberal eco tax program while continuing Ontario's only successful recycling program, the blue box. To me, this is an outright admission of the Liberals' failure to create the right policies to increase Ontario's recycling rate, which has been stalled at just 23% for 10 long years under this Liberal government.

This failure has been marked most noticeably by a major decline in recycling among industries, businesses

and public institutions. For more than a decade, the Liberals have ignored this sector, which accounts for 60% of Ontario's waste. As a result, its recycling rate has declined from 19% to 12% over the last 10 years.

We expected that the environment minister would reflect our policy proposals in his bill because, while the Liberal government had its head in the sand, we were consulting with municipalities, environmental groups and industry representatives on developing a real solution. But the devil is always in the details, so I look forward to reviewing this bill thoroughly.

PREMIER'S AWARDS FOR EXCELLENCE IN THE ARTS

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: I'm pleased to rise this afternoon to respond and congratulate the recipients of the 2013 Premier's Awards for Excellence in the Arts.

These awards recognize the outstanding achievements of artists and arts organizations in Ontario over a significant period of time. Winners are chosen by a jury from the Ontario Arts Council awards office.

Mr. Speaker, please allow me to take a moment to recognize the 2013 award winners who have shown fantastic talent in a number of arts-related disciplines, beginning with Lydia Adams from Caledon East, who is the conductor and artistic director of the Amadeus Choir and the Elmer Iseler Singers. The Canadian Music Centre has hailed Ms. Adams as the leading exponent of the Canadian choral composer.

Iain Baxter& from Windsor is an Officer of the Order of Canada. Mr. Baxter& is a conceptual artist who has boldly gone where no one has gone before—integrating photography, installation, sculpture, painting, drawing and performing aspects into his large array of works.

Jane Bunnett of Toronto is an internationally proclaimed flutist, saxophonist, pianist and composer who has built her career at the crossroads between Cuban music and jazz. Jane is a Juno Award winner, a Canadian Urban Music Award winner and has also been awarded the Order of Canada.

Charlie Foran of Toronto is an author, journalist and teacher and is president of PEN Canada. He has published 10 books, including four novels, and contributes to many magazines and newspapers. Mr. Foran is also a contributing reviewer for the *Globe and Mail*.

Micah Lexier, also from Toronto, is a visual artist and curator. He is intrigued by measurement, games, puzzles and found imagery. He has had more than 100 solo exhibitions and almost 200 group exhibitions and has produced a dozen permanent public commissions, including one in the Leslie subway station here in Toronto.

Shelley Niro of Toronto is a Mohawk painter, filmmaker and photographer. She graduated from the Ontario College of Arts and Design. Shelley is known for her photography, which often combines portraits of contemporary aboriginal women with traditional Mohawk imagery.

Also, there are six arts organizations that deliver arts to Ontario which are recognized by these awards.

Mr. Speaker, as you can see, Ontario is rich with talent in the arts sector. I am proud of the contributions made to our province by these outstanding and deserving individuals. On behalf of our leader, Tim Hudak, and the entire PC caucus, it's my privilege and honour to congratulate this year's winners. Our province is indeed a more enjoyable place to live because of their good works.

1340

PREMIER'S AWARDS FOR EXCELLENCE IN THE ARTS

Mr. Paul Miller: It gives me extra pleasure today to respond to the minister's statement on the Premier's Awards for Excellence in the Arts. We only need to look around this building to see the living embodiment of excellence in the performing arts. Performers from the live and recorded entertainment industries are here today to support the passage of my Bill 71, Protecting Child Performers Act, 2013.

The Premier's Awards for Excellence in the Arts are open to artists and arts organizations engaged in any professional arts practice in Ontario, and recognize their outstanding achievements. The two categories, Artist Award and Arts Organization Award, each carry a total award of \$50,000. There are six nominees in each category.

The Artist Award nominees are: Lydia Adams, of Caledon East, in music; Iain Baxter& of Windsor, in visual arts; Jane Bunnett, of Toronto, in music; Charlie Foran, of Toronto, in literature; Micah Lexier, of Toronto, in visual arts; and Shelley Niro, of Toronto, in visual and media arts. They are excellent representatives of their medium, and I wish each of them good luck in this award, but mostly in their ongoing careers and contributions to our arts community.

The Arts Organization Award nominees are: Authors at Harbourfront Centre, in Toronto, for literature; the Blyth Festival, for theatre; Definitely Superior Art Gallery, in Thunder Bay, for visual arts; Prise de parole, of Sudbury, in book publishing; SKETCH Working Arts, of Toronto, in arts education; and the Toronto Fringe, in theatre. Again, this diverse group represents the talent in every corner of our province. I wish each well in the awards and look forward to their continued growth in their communities.

The Ontario Arts Council selected the finalists for this award, which will be given out at a ceremony later this month, and I want to congratulate the OAC on its 50th anniversary. As I will mention in my remarks later this afternoon, the arts and culture sector creates significant positive economic impact in Ontario. We need to encourage participants in this sector, not only by annual awards, but by significant, stable funding, and we need to look for new ways to provide that stable funding for longer periods, so that forward planning is a much easier exercise and artists can turn their minds to their art.

I congratulate all the recipients.

WASTE DIVERSION

Mr. Jonah Schein: Thank you, Speaker, for the opportunity to respond to the Minister of the Environment's statement. The NDP welcomes the minister's initiative to introduce new legislation to replace the Waste Diversion Act. There is broad consensus that we need to do better on waste reduction in Ontario. Not only is it the right thing to do for the environment, but waste reduction and recycling offer huge potential economic benefits in terms of job creation.

Waste diversion rates in Ontario, unfortunately, are stuck below 25%, far below provincial targets, and numerous problems have arisen under the current legislation. In the past 10 years, the Liberal government has failed to create an effective waste diversion framework that effectively ensures that producers are held responsible for the full life cycle of their products. In fact, the government has been reviewing the old Waste Diversion Act for the last five years.

Meanwhile, the government has idly stood by as consumers have been hit with unfair eco fees set by unaccountable industry-run stewardship organizations. Individual producers have been provided little economic incentive to reduce their waste or to improve their products. A lack of adequate oversight has led to the export or landfilling of materials, which pollutes our environment here in Ontario and overseas, and growth in the recycling sector has been stifled by the monopoly of stewardship organizations.

Our low diversion rates mean that the government has missed real opportunities to spur significant job and economic growth in this province. With seven jobs in diversion created for every one job created in disposal, we need to tap into that potential as a province. But over the last 10 years, we haven't seen strong leadership from this government, and the recent mismanagement of waste diversion in Ontario has undermined the public's confidence in government recycling programs.

It's time for government to set real and forceful targets for diversion, to ban recyclable materials from landfill and to make business truly responsible for the full cost of recycling and disposal. For these reasons, the NDP is happy to hear that the government is finally undertaking this long-overdue step to introduce new legislation, and we look forward to the opportunity to comment more when this goes to second reading.

VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Kitchener-Conestoga on a point of order.

Mr. Michael Harris: I'd like to welcome a grade 5 class from St John's-Kilmarnock of Breslau in my riding. Folks and kids, welcome to Queen's Park.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): That's actually not a point of order, but it's a good time to mention somebody when they visit Queen's Park, so welcome. We're glad you're with us.

PETITIONS

PHYSIOTHERAPY SERVICES

Mr. Jim Wilson: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Ministry of Health is planning on eliminating OHIP-funded physiotherapy services currently provided to seniors in retirement homes—and changing the current provider of the service as of August 1st, 2013; and

"Whereas the Minister of Health has announced a total of \$33 million in physiotherapy funding, or \$550 per senior, for 60,000 seniors, including those in retirement homes; and

"Whereas instead of the 100 to 150 visits per year a senior may receive now from their dedicated on-site OHIP physiotherapy staff, the change would mean a CCAC therapist would provide 5 to 10 visits on-site only to seniors who are bedridden or have an acute injury. All other ambulatory seniors would have to attend other community locations/clinics for physiotherapy and exercise off-site; and

"Whereas this change not only reduces the amount of money available, but also moves funds from the lowest-cost provider (OHIP physiotherapy providers—\$12.20 per treatment) to the highest-cost provider (CCAC—\$120 per treatment); and

"Whereas current OHIP physiotherapy providers, who have been providing seniors with individualized treatments for over 48 years, will be delisted from OHIP by the government; and

"Whereas these services have been proven to help seniors improve in their activities of daily living, mobility, pain and falls risk;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To review and reverse the decision to eliminate OHIP physiotherapy services to seniors in retirement homes, our most vulnerable population and most at risk for falls; and continue with the provision of at least 100 treatments per year with a mechanism to access an additional 50 treatments, if medically necessary, with the current low-cost OHIP physiotherapy providers."

I agree with this petition and I thank the residents and friends of Riverwood Retirement Home in Alliston for sending it to me.

SERVICES EN FRANÇAIS

M^{me} France Gélinas: Hier, le commissaire aux services en français a présenté son rapport. Donc il me fait très plaisir de présenter cette pétition qui vient de partout en Ontario :

« Attendu que la mission du commissaire aux services en français est de veiller à ce que la population reçoive, en français, des services de qualité du gouvernement de l'Ontario et de surveiller l'application de la Loi sur les services en français;

« Attendu que le commissaire a le mandat de mener des enquêtes indépendantes selon la Loi sur les services en français;

« Attendu que contrairement au vérificateur général, à l'ombudsman, au commissaire à l'environnement et au commissaire à l'intégrité qui, eux, relèvent de l'Assemblée législative, le commissaire aux services en français relève de la ministre déléguée aux services en français; »

Ils demandent à l'Assemblée législative de l'Ontario « de changer les pouvoirs du commissaire aux services en français afin qu'il relève directement de l'Assemblée législative. »

J'appuie cette pétition, je vais la signer, et je demande à Carlo Miguel de l'amener aux greffiers.

GASOLINE PRICES

Mr. John O'Toole: I'm pleased to present a petition on behalf of my constituents in the riding of Durham. It reads as follows:

“Whereas the” Wynne “government taxes gasoline” currently “at a rate of 14.7 cents per litre; and

“Whereas the provincial portion of the harmonized sales tax (HST) increases the price of gasoline at the pumps by a further 8%; and

“Whereas Ontario families and Ontario businesses are once again facing steep increases in gasoline prices;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Ontario Legislature to work with citizens, elected MPPs, and all stakeholders to fight rising gasoline prices in Ontario.”

I'm pleased to sign and support this. I present it to Michael, one of the pages on their second-last day.

DOG OWNERSHIP

Mr. Rosario Marchese: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas aggressive dogs are found among all breeds and mixed breeds; and

“Whereas breed-specific legislation has been shown to be an expensive and ineffective approach to dog bite prevention; and

“Whereas problem dog owners are best dealt with through education, training and legislation encouraging responsible behaviour;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“To repeal the breed-specific sections of the Dog Owners’ Liability Act (2005) and any related acts, and to instead implement legislation that encourages responsible ownership of all dog breeds and types.”

I'm a big supporter of this petition and I affix my signature and give it to Lamiha.

1350

WORKPLACE INSURANCE

Mr. Jerry J. Ouellette: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“Whereas, beginning January 1, 2013, the WSIB was expanded to include groups of employers and principals who had previously been exempt from the WSIB and had private insurance; and

“Whereas this new financial burden does nothing to improve worker safety and only drives up the cost of doing business in Ontario; and

“Whereas the economy of Ontario is struggling and government must assist businesses in every way possible;

“We, the undersigned, do hereby petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to repeal the statutory obligations created by Bill 119.”

I affix my signature in support.

CHILDREN'S AID SOCIETIES

Miss Monique Taylor: I have a petition from members from across this province.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the Ontario government has approved a new funding formula to provide funding to the children’s aid societies which are mandated by legislation to provide child protection services to Ontario’s most vulnerable;

“Whereas due to this new formula the Children’s Aid Society of Hamilton will be underfunded approximately \$4 million over the next three years with no changes to mandated child protection responsibilities;

“Whereas chronic underfunding to the Children’s Aid Society of Hamilton will result in dismantling of support services and a loss of staff thereby jeopardizing the ability of the children’s aid society to provide relevant services and protect Hamilton’s children;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“That the Ontario government look critically at the funding provided to the child welfare sector and restore funding to the Children’s Aid Society of Hamilton.”

I couldn’t agree more with this. I affix my name to it and give it to page Jeffrey to bring to the Clerk.

WIND TURBINES

Mr. Jim Wilson: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas we, the residents of Clearview township and neighbouring townships, oppose the wpd Canada Fairview wind project on Fairgrounds Road and all wind energy projects in Clearview township; and

“Whereas we support the petition of mayors and councillors from 80 municipalities, farm organizations, the Ontario Federation of Agriculture and the Christian Farmers Federation of Ontario, which petition requested that the province place an immediate moratorium on all wind projects until an independent and comprehensive health study has determined that turbine noise is safe to human health, amongst other things; and

“Whereas wpd Canada’s Fairview wind project violates the OLS airspace and usability of registered aerodromes in Clearview, including Collingwood Regional

Airport and Stayner field, and wpd Canada's draft renewal energy approvals reports do not recognize these impacts or the jurisdiction of the government of Canada; and

"Whereas wpd Canada is seeking final approval from the province for the Fairview wind project prior to completion of the federal Health Canada study and prior to federal actions to protect aviation safety;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the government of Ontario agree and accept that until the federal health study is completed and federal aeronautical zoning is in place, that it will immediately take whatever action is necessary to give full effect to a moratorium on all wind turbine development in Ontario, including all projects for which final approvals have not been given."

Mr. Speaker, I agree with this petition, and I will sign it.

DOG OWNERSHIP

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: This is a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas currently the law takes the onus off of owners that raise violent dogs by making it appear that violence is a matter of genetics; and

"Whereas the Dog Owners' Liability Act does not clearly define a pit bull, nor is it enforced equally across the province, as pit bulls are not an acknowledged breed;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Legislative Assembly passes Bill 16, Public Safety Related to Dogs Statute Law Amendment Act, 2011, into law" and stop killing the thousand-plus dogs they've already killed, just because of the way they look.

I'm going to give this to Hooriya. I'm going to sign it, and she's going to deliver it to the table.

AIR QUALITY

Mrs. Julia Munro: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas Ontario's Drive Clean program was implemented as a temporary measure to reduce high levels of vehicle emissions and smog; and vehicle emissions have declined significantly from 1998 to 2010; and

"Whereas the overwhelming majority of reductions in vehicle emissions were, in fact, the result of factors other than the Drive Clean program, such as tighter manufacturing standards for emission-control technologies; and

"Whereas from 1999 to 2010 the percentage of vehicles that failed emissions testing under the Drive Clean program steadily declined from 16% to 5%; and

"Whereas the environment minister has ignored advances in technology and introduced a new, computerized emissions test that is less reliable and prone to error;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly as follows:

"That the Minister of the Environment must take immediate steps to begin phasing out the Drive Clean program."

As I am in agreement, I have affixed my signature to give this to page Jeffrey.

CHILDREN'S AID SOCIETIES

Mr. Taras Natyshak: I have a petition from members of my community of Windsor-Essex county that reads:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Ontario government has approved a new funding formula with a fixed funding envelope for children's aid societies which are mandated by legislation to provide child protection services;

"Whereas this new 'fairer' funding model has resulted in a \$50.6-million funding shortfall for agencies across Ontario for 2013-14;

"Whereas due to inadequate funding and the introduction of 'accountability measures' which prevent agencies from running deficits, agencies will be forced to balance budgets by cutting staff and services;

"Whereas those services first cut will be services aimed at preventing abuse and neglect and supporting families, thereby allowing more families to remain intact and fewer children being brought into care, in addition to cuts to supports for foster parents, and other programs to support kids;

"Whereas chronic underfunding to the Windsor-Essex Children's Aid Society will result in cuts to access between children and families, the grouping of access visits with other families, cuts to orthodontics and psychological services, and as a result of cuts to staff, thereby jeopardize the ability of the agency to meet its mandate to protect children;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Ontario government fund \$50.6-million funding shortfall, fix the funding formula to ensure that agencies can maintain services including prevention services and put an immediate halt to staffing cuts that hurt services."

I agree with this petition, will enthusiastically sign it and hand it to the Clerks' table through page Carlo Miguel.

PHYSIOTHERAPY SERVICES

Mr. Monte McNaughton: I have a petition from my riding addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas the Ministry of Health is planning on eliminating OHIP-funded physiotherapy services currently provided to seniors in retirement homes—and changing the current provider of the service as of August 1st, 2013; and

"Whereas the Minister of Health has announced a total of \$33 million in physiotherapy funding, or \$550 per

senior for 60,000 seniors, including those in retirement homes; and....

"Whereas current OHIP physiotherapy providers, who have been providing seniors with individualized treatments for over 48 years, will be delisted from OHIP by the government; ...

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To review and reverse the decision to eliminate OHIP physiotherapy services to seniors in retirement homes, our most vulnerable population and most at risk for falls; and continue with the provision of at least 100 treatments per year with a mechanism to access an additional 50 treatments, if medically necessary, with the current low-cost OHIP physiotherapy providers."

I'll gladly sign this petition.

LONG-TERM CARE

M^{me} France Gélinas: I have this petition that comes from all over Ontario and it reads as follows:

"Whereas there are a growing number of reported cases of abuse, neglect and substandard care for our seniors in long-term-care homes; and

"Whereas people with complaints have limited options, and frequently don't complain because they fear repercussions, which suggests too many seniors are being left in vulnerable situations without independent oversight; and

"Whereas Ontario is one of only two provinces in Canada where the Ombudsman does not have independent oversight of long-term-care homes. We need accountability, transparency and consistency in our long-term-care home system;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to expand the Ombudsman's mandate to include Ontario's long-term-care homes in order to protect our most vulnerable seniors."

I fully support this petition, will affix my name to it and ask Laura to bring it to the Clerk.

SPRINGWATER PROVINCIAL PARK

Mr. Jim Wilson: A petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas we oppose the termination of the operating budget for Springwater Provincial Park in Springwater township on March 31, 2013;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"We ask that the park remain operating and facilities such as the animal sanctuary, cabins/shelters, playground equipment and ground maintenance remain intact and operating."

I agree with this petition, and I will sign it.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The time for petitions has expired.

1400

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

MUNICIPAL AMENDMENT ACT (ELECTION OF CHAIR OF YORK REGION), 2013

LOI DE 2013 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LES MUNICIPALITÉS (ÉLECTION DU PRÉSIDENT DE LA RÉGION DE YORK)

Ms. Jaczek moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 16, An Act to amend the Municipal Act, 2001 to provide that the head of council of The Regional Municipality of York must be elected / Projet de loi 16, Loi modifiant la Loi de 2001 sur les municipalités pour prévoir que le président du conseil de la municipalité régionale de York doit être élu.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Pursuant to standing order 98, the member has 12 minutes for her presentation. Ms. Jaczek.

Ms. Helena Jaczek: Thank you, Speaker. I rise in the House today to propose An Act to amend the Municipal Act, 2001 to provide that the head of council of The Regional Municipality of York must be elected. Bill 16 is about representative democracy and seeks to bring more of it to the residents of York region, something that is clearly absent when it comes to the selection of the chair of York regional council.

Bill 16 is necessary because it will ensure direct accountability of the chair to the electorate. This has been a subject of discussion in York region since at least 1995, when the topic was addressed as part of the York regional council governance review conducted in that year and of which I was project manager. Only members of regional council were involved in that discussion, so, not surprisingly, no consensus was reached, and no action was taken.

As medical officer of health for York region since 1988 and commissioner of health services from 1997 until my retirement in 2006, I have had an opportunity to witness the tremendous changes that the region has experienced in relation to population, budget and service delivery. I believe an appropriate governance structure is needed to reflect these changes.

First, I should explain the current process for selection of the chair of York region, usually known as the regional chair. As many of you know, York region is an upper-tier municipality. The lower tier is comprised of the individual councils of the nine area municipalities that make up the region of York: the town of Aurora, the town of East Gwillimbury, the town of Georgina, the township of King, the city of Markham, the town of Newmarket, the town of Richmond Hill, the city of

Vaughan, and the town of Whitchurch-Stouffville. As the member of provincial Parliament for Oak Ridges-Markham, I represent people living in four of these nine area municipalities.

The upper tier—that is, York regional council—is composed of 21 members. These members include the nine mayors, the 11 regional councillors who are elected from the lower-tier municipalities, and a chair. The number of representatives that each municipality elects to regional council ranges from only the mayor in the smaller municipalities to the mayor and up to four regional councillors in the larger ones.

Every four years, as in all municipalities in Ontario, residents of York region elect their municipal councils, casting votes for their local councillors, mayor and, in the case of Georgina, Markham, Newmarket, Richmond Hill and Vaughan, for their regional councillors. In municipalities that elect them, the regional councillors also serve on their local councils.

Absent, however, is an election for the regional chair. The chair is chosen by the 20 members of the council through a nomination process at the inaugural meeting of the regional municipality of York council. It is possible for any member of council to nominate any resident of York region. The individual nominated does not need to be an elected official. After the nomination is seconded, the council votes for the position of regional chair. I've attended eight inaugural meetings of York regional council over the years, and only once, in 1997, was there more than one nomination for chair. In the other seven cases, there was an acclamation of the incumbent.

During the last 42 years, only five people have served as regional chair. I think at this point it is important to honour the work done by these five individuals: Garfield Wright, Bob Forhan, Tony Roman, Eldred King and Bill Fisch. I've known them all. Unfortunately, three have passed away. But I can personally attest to their hard work, their dedication to the region of York and the important contributions they have made.

This bill does not in any way diminish their accomplishments. However, it is time for a new selection process for the office of regional chair. This bill is about moving forward in a democratic fashion to ensure accountability to the people of York region.

First established in 1971, when the population was 160,000, York region is one of Canada's fastest-growing municipalities. Now, with a population of over 1.1 million people, it requires a modern system of governance that is truly accountable to its citizens.

The regional chair and CEO, as the role is now entitled, is a position that holds a great deal of power over how the business of the region is conducted. The chair sets the direction of council, has control over the agenda of council meetings and sits as an ex officio member on all committees. In fact, the chair is the only member of council who works full-time on regional business, as the other councillors must attend to the business of their area municipalities as well.

The responsibilities of the regional chair have increased dramatically as York region has grown. Today

the regional chair is responsible for a budget of nearly \$3 billion, which includes \$1.2 billion for capital projects. It is quite astonishing that responsibility for these taxpayer dollars is vested in an unelected individual.

Furthermore, York region's website suggests that its economy, at \$43 billion, is bigger than four Canadian provinces. The regional chair is the official spokesperson for the region, and frequently has a role in representing the region on the national and even international stage. An elected chair would give added legitimacy, also, in this circumstance.

The tax-supported services provided by York region are vital to our everyday lives. They include regional planning, transit, community services and housing, court services, emergency medical services or land ambulance, public health—my personal favourite—long-term care, employment and financial support, waste management, forestry, roads, provision of water, and sewage disposal.

In my capacity as commissioner of health services for York region and as a member of the senior management team, it was my experience that many residents of York region do not necessarily recognize the vital role the regional chair plays in the leadership of council. Often, this is because there is confusion over what services are provided by the local municipality and what services are provided by the region.

For example, in regard to waste management, curbside pickup is the responsibility of the local municipality; however, disposal of garbage and recycling is the responsibility of the region. Distribution of potable water to individual homes is a local municipal service, but the region is required to source and treat surface and ground water. Sewage collection from homes is likewise a local municipal service, but treatment of waste water must be done by the region.

Confusion about the provision of services by residents of York region became very evident during the 2012 York regional transit strike. I found myself having to explain to upset constituents the integral role and tremendous authority that the regional chair has over transit and the many other important services provided by the regional government. A consistent reaction was that my constituents had never heard of the regional chair and were surprised that their hard-earned tax dollars were entrusted to a council whose head was an individual for whom they could not vote.

Since first reading of Bill 16 earlier this year, I have asked my constituents if they know the name of the current regional chair. With the exception of some municipal employees and a few others, it is rare to find anyone who does. By contrast, the name of their local mayor is almost universally known.

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Allowing the citizens of York region to elect their regional chair will help underscore the importance of the position. If the chair of York regional council is elected by citizens, the individuals who seek election will likely develop a platform that outlines a vision for the region. Upon election, accountability to the electorate will be

clear. At the subsequent election, the electorate can judge whether the incumbent deserves re-election.

Through elections, citizens can play an active role in shaping their future. Important regional issues can be debated, and representatives can be held accountable by their electorate.

Most regional municipalities across Ontario have already come to the conclusion that an elected regional chair brings more accountability, representation and democracy to their governance. York region has the opportunity to join the regions of Durham, Halton, Niagara and Waterloo in serving the public interest in a more democratic manner. In fact, the only regions in the greater Toronto and Hamilton area that do not elect the chair of their regional councils are York and Peel.

The passage of this bill is important to me, my more than 240,000 constituents in the great riding of Oak Ridges—Markham all the residents of York region. To date, I have received written support from a number of York region councillors. These include Jim Jones and Joe Li, from Markham; Rob Hargrave, from Whitchurch-Stouffville; Debbie Schaefer, from King; Marilyn Iafrate, from Vaughan; Jane Twinney and Chris Emanuel, from Newmarket; and Wendy Gaertner, from Aurora.

In the event that passage of this bill cannot change the process for selection of the York regional chair in time for the next municipal election in 2014, I would urge York regional council to ask for a referendum during that election to ask the citizens of York region their opinion on whether the regional chair should be elected. I predict the result will be similar to that obtained in Durham in 2010, when over 80% expressed their support.

When this bill was introduced in the last parliamentary session by my colleague from Richmond Hill, it received all-party support. I ask my colleagues to continue that support today. Amending the Ontario Municipal Act to ensure the chair of York region is elected will be a victory for representative democracy, not only in York region, but for all in this province.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member for Etobicoke North on a point of order.

Mr. Shafiq Qaadir: On behalf of all members of the assembly, Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to welcome a delegation visiting from Pakistan, led by Mr. Muhammad Ismail Qureshi, the leader, and Mr. Naeem Aslam, the dean and deputy leader.

We have representatives from the Pakistan ministry of foreign affairs; provincial governments of Sindh and Punjab; police services; planning, revenue and administration services; as well as Mr. Imran Chaudhry of the consulate general of Pakistan.

With your permission, Speaker, the visiting members are:

- ambassador from the ministry of foreign affairs, Ghulam Dastgir;

- Dr. Muhammad Afzal, director general, planning commission;

- Muhammad Nawaz Warraich, deputy inspector general of police;

- Dr. Saqib Aziz, secretary sports, government of Punjab;

- Saleem Raza Asif, commissioner, inland revenue service;

- Musawwar Abbas Naqvi, Pakistan administrative services;

- Iqbal Ahsan Zaidi, Pakistan administrative services;

- Nafees Iqbal, secretary, government of Sindh; and

- Mrs. Shazia Rizvi, secretary, government of Sindh. Bienvenue. Welcome. Khush amdid.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Welcome to our visitors.

Further debate?

Mr. Peter Shurman: I'm pleased to rise in support of Bill 16, brought forward by my colleague from Oak Ridges—Markham, as I supported the predecessor bill, Bill 60, which was introduced originally by the member for Richmond Hill.

As my colleague mentioned in her opening statement, York region consists of 20 elected representatives and one unelected person, and that's the regional chair. That's something with which I think most people in a democratic society basically disagree: that somebody should have the level of power that we're talking about in York region, without having been elected and being accountable directly to the people.

We're not talking about personalities here, I would hasten to add. This is not a commentary with regard to the person who holds that seat at the present moment. It has to do with fairness no matter where the representation takes place.

This is a very large geographic area, well described by my colleague. I rise in debate because I represent some fairly sizable pieces of two of the largest cities that form York region, and those are Markham and Vaughan. The responsibilities of the regional council—and that works directly through the chair—include public health; residential and commercial development; regional transit, which I'll have a further word to say about; roads; waste management; policing; emergency services; and social services. If you take those as a collectivity, that is a goodly number of the things that residents derive service on in their everyday lives. They see and feel the effects of what that council does on a daily basis and very particularly what that person does. So one of the most powerful positions in the region is regional chair. The salary recorded for that position in 2011, the latest figure I have, is about \$208,000. I imagine it has risen since then.

But I wanted to take my time to illustrate an example of what happens when you have an unaccountable chair and citizens who are really in dire need of change. Representing the riding of Thornhill, I have a particular situation in front of me that technically should be in the province of the chair, the council at the regional level, the council at the city level—in this case, Vaughan—and I'm talking about the plan to build a diversion from the Highway 7 transit way, which is a dedicated 25-kilometre centre lane idea that's under construction now by

bringing it down Bathurst Street into the very centre of Thornhill, being Centre Street. There is no wiggle room here, as I've been told.

I've taken this directly to the Minister of Transportation, who is sympathetic, who took the time to actually visit the site and take a look at it, who I can't speak for, but I felt was sympathetic enough that if he could change things, he would. But the problem with this is that it rests with the regional chair up in Newmarket.

We're talking about \$100 million here. We're talking about the splitting of a community here. We're talking about people here who are citizens and have a right to be heard. And yet their local councillor, who has direct responsibility, says, "I know better than you. I'm not going to take this to the city," and therefore it doesn't really work its way through that councillor, the regional councillor, the mayor and up to the chair.

I hope through this appeal I have been able to raise some eyebrows at the regional level, notably with the chair of the region, and I hope I have been able to illustrate my point as to why we need an elected and responsible and accountable person in that position.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Mr. Rosario Marchese: I'm happy to speak to Bill 16. I'll be supporting this bill; I think it's a good one. I also supported David Caplan's bill, which he introduced in 2010—I think he was in Don Valley East, if I recall—although his bill was so that every person who has a non-elected chair—that the chair be elected, and it doesn't matter whether it's York or other regions. That was his bill at the time. The now Minister of Research and Innovation, Mr. Moridi, introduced a bill in 2012, I think, similar to this one, and we have the member from Oak Ridges moraine introducing Bill 16 today.

Interjection: Markham.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Markham. Good heavens, what happened there?

Mr. Steven Del Duca: Oak Ridges—Markham.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Oak Ridges—Markham. What did I say?

Interjection: Moraine.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Moraine. Well, it seemed to make sense—with apologies, of course.

I think it's a good bill. My worry is that when you have three Liberal members who introduce bills that are reasonable, you wonder, "What does it take?" And they're in government. I could understand if three New Democrats introduced that bill over a period of time; it makes sense that the government would reject it. I could understand if the official opposition does that three times and the current government says, "We've got some issues." But when government members introduce it, I wonder to myself, "What is the holdup? What are the obstacles?"

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It's not as if we've introduced thousands of bills in the last couple of years that might be holding some bill back. When we have so little to do, I think it's a good time to

introduce bills that have three-party support. I think this is one of them.

I'm hoping that the member from Oak Ridges—Markham—

Mr. Steven Del Duca: Markham.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: —that's what I had written, by the way—will have some success this time with this bill. She might go to the minister—and she probably has already done that—to indicate to her that there are parties on the other side who agree. And they are not agreeing just today; they agreed yesterday and the day before that. So when you have three-party approval, I think it's important for the government to move on these things. The arguments that I've heard from others are very good and sound. I think that people are ready.

We now have Halton-Waterloo that has moved to a direct election.

Hon. James J. Bradley: I always like hearing you speak, Rosie.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Thank you, Jim. Good to see you.

We now have Hamilton-Wentworth, which, of course, was amalgamated, which made it easier, and the region of Durham. The member from Oak Ridges—

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: Markham.

M^{me} France Gélinas: Oak Ridges—Markham.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: It's Oak Ridges—Markham. That's what I said.

The folks from Durham voted 80% in favour of having a direct election, and I suspect that once we allow the York region electorate to have a vote on this, we will have a high number of people—80% or more—agreeing that there should be a direct election, because it makes sense. It's the modern thing to do. You cannot have a highly paid individual—by the way, these folks are highly paid, and some will argue that they should be. I understand that. They are more highly paid than MPPs—which might make sense; I don't know. That individual makes almost as much as the Premier, and the Premier has got a whole province to worry about.

As I used to say to the former Premier and the current Premier, they have to face question period here each and every day and get slapped around by everyone in this Legislature and outside, and she makes as much as the regional chair of York—just a little bit more. I don't know whether that's fair, but if the person is going to earn as much money as he or she does, they should be elected, and I think the majority of people agree with that.

Hon. James J. Bradley: Federal MPs got a raise.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: That's another matter. I will not speak to that because it's irrelevant in the scheme of things.

Interjection: They have a pension.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: They have a pension, which we don't.

Some people might argue that voter turnout will be higher if we have direct election. I'm not persuaded by that—I really am not—but I'm not sure that that's the

appropriate argument. I think the right argument is that it will engage people, because if they know that they have a choice as to who they want as their candidate, they will pay attention and they will be involved, one way or another, in selecting the candidate that they want to see in that position. So I do believe that there's an argument for voter engagement, which does make a whole lot of sense.

Some people might argue that only wealthy candidates will apply because it will cost a whole lot of money to run in an election, and that will indeed exclude a whole lot of candidates who, once they find out that they might have to raise—what, \$150,000, \$200,000, \$300,000, \$400,000? If a mayor of Toronto has to raise \$1 million, what about the person in York region, which includes a whole lot of municipalities, as we just heard? They are quite expansive and quite big in many cases. So if it's \$1 million in Toronto, how much would it be in York region? Can anybody guess?

Interjections.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Half a million? Okay.

It's a whole lot of money you have to raise, and some municipal councils will have to decide, "Do I run for that position or not?" But that's a choice they would have to make. Do they exclude themselves on the basis that they might have to raise too much money and wouldn't be able to and thus not be able to compete with the wealthy candidates who might have their own pecunia to run an election or who are so well connected that they will be able to raise the money from many of their, shall I say, developer friends and/or others? Of course, there are a lot of wealthy people other than developers. I say developers because we have a whole lot of construction in the GTA. We have a whole lot of construction in Toronto. I'm quite familiar with the developers here. They know me quite well. I'm not sure how much they like me, but they know me quite well. In York region, there's a whole lot of development and much of it is condominiums. I suspect there would be a lot of contributions made to that candidate. So some people will have to compete. How do you compete?

One of the suggestions is that if we have rebates to the donors, as we have in Toronto, that might make it easier for people to decide to run—because an individual contribution of a hundred dollars goes a long way. If you have a great deal of popular support in an area and they like you, a \$50 contribution or a \$100 contribution can go a long way. The candidates who have the support of the wealthy will get the bigger contributions. But if you are a popular person and you get a whole lot of \$100 contributions, that could go a long way. That individual will be able to compete almost on the same playing field as the other candidates. It doesn't equalize it altogether, you understand, but it does help.

You could, on the other hand, simply abolish donations of the unions and the corporate sector. You could do that, which is something that we have talked about in the past. The federal government does this. The province could certainly move in that direction if it wanted to. That's another possibility. But I suspect if we don't

support these bills, getting to the other might be a little more complicated. So let's not worry about that.

But we could permit rebates as a way of facilitating that level playing field, which I think would make it easier.

On the whole, I believe this is a good bill. Direct election is the modern thing to do. Democracies are stronger when people have a say in who they want to represent them. The fact that we have delayed this for so long speaks to the government's inability, sometimes, to get things done. It does puzzle me because, as the member from Oak Ridges-Markham pointed out, this has been discussed since 1995. I'm not quite sure why, often, good things take so long to get done. I don't understand. I really don't. But I am persuaded that this time, perhaps, maybe, we might get it done, with the support of both the official opposition and the third party. We can help. We said we want to help you. Bring it forth; we'll debate it. We don't have to debate this bill forever, because I don't think it will take that long—well, a couple of days should do it, and we'll get it out of here. Then we'll allow the people to have a vote so that the people can say, in a referendum, "Yea, we want this to happen," and we're done.

Member from Oak Ridges-Markham, I'm on your side. I think New Democrats are on your side on this. We want to be able to vote on this as quickly as possible and get it done. Maybe you can be the one who made this happen.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Mr. Steven Del Duca: As always, it's a privilege and a pleasure for me to stand in my place here in this hallowed chamber and deliver some relatively brief comments regarding this particular item.

I want to say, before I get into the meat of my discussion here today, that I listened to what the members opposite and, of course, my colleague the member from Oak Ridges-Markham had to say about this bill. I'm happy to hear that there is, so far in the course of the discussion today, very broad support for an initiative that I'm proud to stand on with my colleagues, not just the member from Oak Ridges-Markham, but also our other colleague the member from Richmond Hill, who in the past, as has been mentioned here today, has tried to move this particular item through the Legislature. I'd also am happy to note that there are several other members who also represent York region ridings who are here today to participate in the discussion and be here for this fairly important item.

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I am very proud, as I've said many times over the last eight months, to represent the wonderful community of Vaughan, which, as many will know, is in the heart of York region. I think it's important, as has been said, because of the explosive growth that's occurred in York region. I've lived in Vaughan for about 25 years, and to have witnessed first-hand the way that York region has developed and has exploded in terms of its growth is actually something that's remarkable.

I know that many other 905 communities around Toronto share similar characteristics, but to consider that we're in a position now to recognize that we are talking about the position of what is essentially the chief executive officer of such a growing concern, to recognize that up until this point—perhaps for some many good, historic reactions—this is a position that was appointed, initially by the province and then by the members of council itself. I think there was probably definitely a time and place for that kind of approach to this, but given the growth, given what's been happening across York region and given what the vision is for where York region has to go over the next generation, I, along with my colleagues who have spoken prior to me standing up today—and I'm in agreement with them. We need to get to a point where the residents of York region themselves have the opportunity to, over the course of an election campaign, like we all do in this chamber and they do in the federal House and they do when they run for regional council itself, put their ideas, their thoughts and their own concepts and their own vision for the future of the region itself before the people who they will ultimately impact the most, the residents of the particular jurisdiction. I think it is really important that we take that next logical step, as I believe the member from Trinity-Spadina said.

So I do want to applaud my colleague from Oak Ridges-Markham for bringing this forward at this point in time, and I am quite happy to hear so far in the course of this discussion today that there is broad support for moving forward.

I don't have a lot of time but I want to just say as well that I think it is important to recognize that in our current chair in York region we have an individual who has devoted himself to many, many years of outstanding public service in his current role. When I think about a couple of projects in my riding, be it the Vaughan hospital project, the extension of Highway 427 or a lot of others—certainly around public transit—it's important to recognize someone who's been a very passionate advocate for helping to shape the growth in York region, Mr. Bill Fisch, and the rest of the folks on York regional council. But notwithstanding the outstanding contribution of Bill Fisch and the rest of his colleagues on York regional council, this is to me the next natural step in an evolution around a community that is maturing in such an important and, as I said earlier, explosive way.

Like I said, it is important to make sure that in the course of a campaign we're all battle-tested. Folks in our respective communities have the chance to kick the tires and see where we stand on a whole host of issues, and I think it's important to make sure we do that in this process now. So I'm happy to say that I'm supporting this, along with my colleagues, and I look forward to the rest of the discussion. We'll take it from there.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Mr. Frank Klees: I'm pleased to participate in this debate. Let me say at the outset that I will certainly be supporting this bill, as I did when the member for Rich-

mond Hill, Mr. Reza Moridi, brought this bill forward the last time.

This is a very straightforward bill. Reference has been made to a referendum. There's no need for a referendum here. The way this bill reads is very straightforward: "The head of council shall be elected by general vote in accordance with the Municipal Elections Act, 1996." That's essentially it. If this Legislature passes this bill, it's done—and it should be done in time for the next election.

You know, it's the glacial speed of government that, after 18 years, continues on occasion to depress me, because here we are spending an entire hour of debate. We did the same thing with Mr. Moridi's bill. Members of the government are all in support; the members of the third party, I assume, are; certainly the official opposition is. People out there have to be wondering what's going on, what is the problem?

You'll ask for the vote. We're going to support this. We're going to affirm the fact that the chair of York region—a population of some 1.1 million—should be accountable to the people who are then going to benefit or be otherwise affected by the decisions of that person.

Prior to this bill being debated the last time, I personally spoke with Mr. Darcy McKeough and Mr. Bill Davis. One was the former Minister of Municipal Affairs and Minister of Economics and Intergovernmental Affairs, who was the architect of regional government; the other was the Premier at the time that regional government was put in place.

I asked both gentlemen, in a direct conversation about this issue: When the regional chair was appointed, was it the intention that that position would perpetually be appointed? Both gentlemen said no. It was always anticipated that as the regional government matured, there would be a direct election and the regional chair would be accountable to the people they represent. Well, folks, that was 1971. It's now 2013. When are we going to catch up with the intentions of the good people in this place in 1971? We simply need to do it.

Chair, in the interest of full disclosure, I have been asked if I would be interested in running for this position.

Applause.

Mr. Frank Klees: The Liberal members would love to get rid of me, I know, but as many of my colleagues have said before me, "I'm not contemplating that at this time."

I'd just simply say that it's the right thing to do. Let's get it done. If not approving this bill, let's have the Minister of Municipal Affairs bring in a government bill to get it done in time for the next election.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Hon. Michael Chan: Thank you, Speaker, for this opportunity to talk about this bill, Bill 16. First and foremost, I'd like to thank my colleague from Oak Ridges-Markham for her great effort in introducing this bill. She works very hard for her constituents, and also for the people in the good area of York region. I supported this

bill before, when it was first introduced by my colleague from Richmond Hill, and I am very, very happy to see it reintroduced.

As MPP for Markham–Unionville, I represent 136,857 people.

Mr. Rob Leone: Wow.

Hon. Michael Chan: That's a lot. They have elected me as their representative since 2007. The local council of Markham has eight councillors and a mayor, all of whom are democratically elected. Markham also has four regional councillors who sit on both the local council and also on the regional council. These, as well, are all elected positions.

It seems odd to me that the regional chair, who leads the regional council, is not elected. The chair is the face of the entire region, but is accountable only to the council. Now that our region is one of the fastest-growing areas in the country, Speaker, it's time for a change.

Accountability is a virtue in our democracy that Canadians value. The residents of York region are no different. Currently, the constituency to which the chair is responsible is council, not the region at large. The chair directs the vision for the region. Currently, those on the council appoint the individual who sets the vision.

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With Bill 16, the region at large would determine what vision they want for the future. Durham will be voting for their regional chair in the 2014 elections. It's time for York to join Durham, Waterloo and Halton in bringing more democracy to their residents. Waterloo has been electing their chair for a long time, with great success. It is time for York to do the same. Through elections, the residents of the region have more choice. We are doing the 1.1 million residents of York a disservice by not providing them with the ability to choose their regional chair. The chair has a lot of power and needs to be accountable to the residents and not just 20 members of regional council. Across the country, accountability and transparency are important parts of our democracy. York region is facing an accountability and transparency deficit with the selection of the regional chair. Bill 16 seeks to fix that.

Once again, I would like to thank the member from Oak Ridges–Markham for raising this important issue today. When Bill 16 was first introduced, it had all-party support, and I hope to see that repeated.

I gladly support this bill, and I hope the members of this House will do the same.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Mrs. Julia Munro: I'm pleased to be able to join the debate today on Bill 16, the proposal from my colleague the MPP for Oak Ridges–Markham.

As others have mentioned, this is the second time, I think, that we've seen this bill, and my opinion, and I think everyone else's, has stayed the same. It gave me the opportunity, though, to just pause for a minute and look at maybe a couple of new arguments or rerun arguments for why this bill should receive the attention and the

support of this House. Several others have mentioned the other regions that have been incorporated. Certainly the fact that Waterloo region was done back in 1997 gives us a sense of the kind of opportunities that having an elected chair make, and the fact that Durham will be heading into the next municipal election, electing for the first time its regional chair.

So there's no doubt about the fact that we're looking at that being a trend, and I think that there are some very important reasons for that trend. One of them has to be the issue of the population growth in York region. When you look at the size of York region and realize that it is larger than some provinces of this country, it gives you a sense of the complexity and, quite frankly, the incentive to have a fully representational, senior, upper-tier government, and with modern technology, direct election is just that much easier than it has been. I look at my own constituents and the complexity of the service delivery in the region and the municipality, and the concerns that people have about that complexity and the lack of the accountability.

The member mentioned the transit strike, and that provided such a window of learning for most people. Quite frankly, they were very unsympathetic to the fact that they did not have an elected person who was in that leadership role.

I just would say, as I hope this bill moves forward and that we are looking at some of the issues further, that one of the things about it is that in my riding there's a significantly smaller population than in the southerly parts of York region, and so my constituents would certainly want to feel that their voices are going to be heard from the northern part of York region. We have a lot of issues in York region of underfunding at the provincial level of the high-growth areas. Again, I would want to make sure that we're going to have that strong elected voice to redress some of that.

In closing the brief minutes I have, I would just say I will certainly support this bill moving forward. I do think that we have some issues, though, in terms of the mechanics and the differences in population that will have to be worked out, but we're certainly in support of it.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Ms. Dipika Damerla: I'm delighted to rise today and speak in favour of Bill 16, which is being put forward by my colleague the member from Oak Ridges–Markham.

Quite simply, before I say anything, I do want to say that this is not about any one individual; there are a number of appointed chairs across Ontario, including in the region of Peel. I have to say that most of them are doing a fantastic job, and if most of them were to stand for an election, I'm sure they would win handily. So this really isn't about personalities.

What is at stake is the concept of democracy, the idea that if somebody has executive power on behalf of the taxpayer, if somebody is spending money on behalf of

the taxpayer, that person ought to be directly responsible to the taxpayer and be elected by them. That's the principle at stake and that's why I'm here to support the bill.

If I have one criticism of the bill, it would be that I wish the member had made it broader—not just for the region of York, but for all of Ontario. I think all Ontarians, wherever there is a regional government, deserve that shot at democracy at the regional level, at the chair level.

Lastly, I want to say I did hear a few—I guess not criticisms, but certain suggestions that electing a chair isn't perfect and that there might be some downside to it. I would agree: There is no perfect system. But on balance, even though there were some legitimate concerns around spending limits and who can run for it, whether somebody who's not very rich can run for it, and the idea around the voice of smaller municipalities being heard—all of them are valid concerns, but I think the principle of democracy trumps all of them.

I'm going to quote Winston Churchill, and I'm sure most of us are familiar with this: "Democracy is the worst form of government, except for all those other forms that have been tried from time to time." That is the reason I'm delighted to support this bill, and I hope that it actually goes broader. Thank you so much for bringing it forward. I support it.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Hon. Glen R. Murray: Across Canada, we've gone through an interesting period in municipal reform. We saw the emergence of metropolitan and regional governments first—many cities: Toronto; Winnipeg, where I was; Vancouver; Halifax. It's hard to find an urban region that didn't see the emergence of a metropolitan government.

It's interesting that we went through a period of layering, and now we're often in a period, as we were with Hamilton, where we went back to one tier of government, with an elected mayor and chair. We have a very inconsistent pattern of municipal democracy, and we're seeing it here. I think this is a positive step forward.

It's also different. Rural communities, large rural regions, northern regions—as you know, I'm a big believer in decentralization of government. I've argued many times that we need more decentralized government in the north and more power in the north, and I've also believed that putting more power—there's a principle called subsidiarity, where all decisions would be local decisions, unless there's a need for them not to be. I think people make better decisions in their communities.

I commend the member from Oak Ridges—Markham. We have something in common: She has the most populous seat in the Legislature; I think I have the second.

Elected chairs: Mr. Fisch has been doing a wonderful job. He's been a great ally. I don't think there has been a regional chair who's done more to advance transit. York

region has stepped forward as one of the most significant funding partners in the Big Move, so we have huge regard and respect for Mr. Fisch and are very thankful for his leadership. But I think the emerging importance of regional governments requires them now to have an elected official. That gives that person more strength, more political clout, and more ability to make a difference.

So I think I'm finished my time, and I appreciate it.

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The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member for Oak Ridges—Markham, you have two minutes.

Ms. Helena Jaczek: Thank to you all those members who spoke to Bill 16.

The member from Thornhill mentioned Bill Fisch, our current chair. Bill Fisch was my boss for nearly 10 years, and I have nothing but the greatest respect for him, as has been said by so many people who are familiar with the work that he has done. There's no question, he has just been a superlative regional chair.

To the member for Trinity—Spadina: Well, perhaps third time lucky, in terms of now having support very clearly articulated today from both the official opposition and the third party. We all know that our Premier, Kathleen Wynne, believes in consensus. She believes in making this Parliament work. I think we have an excellent opportunity to move this bill forward.

Many members, including the member from Vaughan, mentioned citizen engagement as probably the most important issue when it comes to direct election. That certainly is part of the democratic process, ensures accountability and is extremely important.

The member from Newmarket—Aurora: I do share some of his frustration with what he calls the glacial speed of government. But I'm also a realist, so if by some chance there is not the ability to make this happen by 2014, as a fallback I would certainly urge councillors in York region to consult their constituents through a referendum.

The Minister of Tourism, Culture and Sport, again, has great experience, clearly, in the region of York and knows the situation there intimately. I'm grateful for your support.

The member from York—Simcoe may come from the more rural part of York region, but I think her support is extremely important.

Yes, to the member from Mississauga East—Cooksville, I think Peel deserves the same type of representation. Perhaps we can together go to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and urge that.

What can we say about the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation? He's always enthusiastic about ensuring democracy is alive and well.

Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): We'll take the vote at the end of private members' public business.

**PROTECTING CHILD
PERFORMERS ACT, 2013**

**LOI DE 2013 SUR LA PROTECTION
DES ENFANTS ARTISTES**

Mr. Paul Miller moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 71, An Act to protect child performers in the live entertainment industry and the recorded entertainment industry / Projet de loi 71, Loi visant à protéger les enfants artistes dans l'industrie du spectacle vivant et l'industrie du spectacle enregistré.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Pursuant to standing order 98, the member has 12 minutes for his presentation.

Mr. Paul Miller: It is a tremendous pleasure to welcome to the Legislature some of Ontario's finest performers in the recorded and live entertainment industries.

First, in the Speaker's gallery, is Canadian television, film and stage actress, activist, Officer of the Order of Canada, and this year's ACTRA lifetime achievement award winner, Shirley Douglas. Not only is it an honour to have Shirley Douglas in the Legislature in her own right, but to have the daughter of Tommy Douglas here supporting protection for child performers is extraordinary.

Attending with ACTRA and the Canadian Actors' Equity Association are, from ACTRA: Art Hindle, Clara Pasieka, Connor Price, David Sparrow, Farah Merani, Maria Del Mar, Richard Young, Shannon Kook-Chun, Bien Herrara, Theresa Tova and Tabby Johnson. ACTRA staff: Sue Milling, Cathy Wendt, Karen Woolridge, Lisa Blanchette, Karl Pruner and Barb Larose.

From Equity: Lynn McQueen, Jeremy Civiero, Arden Ryshpan, Evan Klassen, Amariah Faulkner and Danielle Faulkner.

Speaker, all these people are here to ensure passage of Bill 71, to ensure the best protection for child performers in Ontario. Our live and recorded entertainment industries highlighted the tremendous homegrown talent that we have in many areas of our province, and our entertainment industry is a significant economic force.

I'll read a quotation from the Ontario Media Development Corp.'s March 1 news release: "Film and television activity contributed \$1.28 billion to the provincial economy in 2012 and accounted for almost 29,000 full-time direct and indirect jobs. Since 2008, economic activity has increased by 90%, and the 2012 financial results are the strongest ever."

In the March backgrounder to the OMDC release, it was reported that the domestic production dollars left in Ontario in 2010 were \$646.2 million, which increased to \$871.9 million in 2012. Additionally, foreign production dollars left in Ontario in 2010 were \$318.2 million, up to \$404.5 million in 2012. These numbers alone tell us the significance of the film and television production industry in Ontario.

The calibre of the writing, the performances and the productions are obviously top-notch, but we have a dark

little secret here in Ontario, Speaker, and it's about our lack of clear and direct obligations to child performers. We don't have legislated hours of work, set breaks, play or resting areas, or requirements for appropriate tutoring or healthy snacks or for who can chaperone, tutor or act as a guardian.

The Minister of Labour, ACTRA, Equity and the producers worked diligently on a series of very strong guidelines to address these concerns. However, guidelines do not have to be followed. They look nice on the shelf, but if they only provide a preferred way of treating child performers, there will be those who will prefer not to follow those guidelines. ACTRA and Equity continued their efforts during their contract negotiations and have included as many safeguards as possible in their contracts.

The guidelines in these contracts informed the writing of Bill 71. The writing process recognized that the obligations to child performers are different in the recorded and live entertainment industries. So Bill 71 sets out requirements separately for each of these performance areas. Bill 71, possibly with some minor tweaks, will go a long way to ensuring that child performers will have the best and safest experience while providing the entertainment industry with the child performances necessary to tell the whole story.

A fact sheet was handed out at our press conference at noon, and it provided information essential to this issue. To be sure that every member of this Legislature is able to read that information, I will read it into the record now.

"Why do we need more than the Ontario Child Performers Guideline?"

"The Child Performers Guideline was developed by the Ministry of Labour in consultation with industry stakeholders.

"Some of these guidelines are supported by the provisions of the Occupational Health and Safety Act, but others—like part 3 of the guideline—are presented as 'best practices' and carry little or no legal force.

"Furthermore, the guideline is silent on many aspects of the engagement of child performers.

"The Child Performers Guideline offers a solid foundation, but must be enshrined in legislation so that the full weight of the law may be brought to bear when necessary.

"For example, limited hours of work for minors are only 'strongly encouraged' to be incorporated into workplace practices."

"The same is true, for the appointment of a chaperone, the provision of breaks in the workday, and travel to and from the workplace, among other provisions.

"Other aspects of the engagement of child performers that are not addressed in the guidelines include:

"—provision of tutoring;

"—regulation of exposure to moral hazards; and

"—protection of earnings through a requirement to put a portion of earnings in trust.

"ACTRA and Equity have negotiated strong collective-agreement language to address these issues. While we are proud of the work they have done, it is unconscionable that the welfare of children should be subject to market forces and the uncertainty of negotiated contracts.

"Some producers and engagers do not adhere to ACTRA or Equity contracts and, as a result, many child performers do not even have the protection of a collective agreement."

Has this type of legislation been introduced elsewhere? Yes. In British Columbia, minimum standards for wages and working conditions for children working in the live and recorded entertainment industry are set under the Employment Standards Act and employment standards regulation. The legislation covers minimum age, daily hours, split shifts, breaks, time before a recording device, hours free from work, work week, chaperones, and income protection.

1500

In Manitoba, the Worker Recruitment and Protection Act improves protections for children in the talent and modelling industry by making the agency and the parents/guardians of child performers jointly responsible for the safety and well-being of the child. It helps parents and guardians and agencies to recognize and to prevent the potential for exploitation before it happens.

A child under the age of 17 who will be promoted by a talent agency must have a child performer's permit from employment standards. The offence of operating without a licence or contravening the legislation is subject to fines from \$25,000 to \$50,000.

History of income protection for child performers: Coogan accounts, a.k.a. blocked trust accounts and trust accounts, are required in the United States only in California, New York, Louisiana and New Mexico. Fifteen percent, which is not much, of the minor's gross wages are required to be withheld by the employer and deposited into the Coogan account within 15 days of employment.

The Coogan Law is named for the famous child actor Jackie Coogan. Coogan was discovered in 1919 by Charlie Chaplin and soon after cast into the comedian's famous film *The Kid*. Jackie-mania was in full force during the 1920s, spawning a wave of merchandise dedicated to his image. It wasn't until his 21st birthday, after the death of his father and the dwindling of his film career, that Coogan realized he was left with none of the earnings he had worked so hard for as a child. Under California law at the time, the earnings of the minor belonged solely to the parent.

Coogan eventually sued his own mother and former manager for his earnings. As a result, in 1939 the Coogan Law was put into effect to protect future actors from finding themselves in the same terrible situation that Jackie Coogan was left in.

Jackie Coogan went on to recover a small portion of his earnings after battling his own mother in court. He became well known for playing Uncle Fester in the

television series *The Addams Family* and will always be remembered for the role his story played in protecting child actors from losing their earnings.

Even long after the Coogan Law went into effect, another child performer who grew up with no savings from years of child performances was Shirley Temple. These are extreme examples, but we want to be sure that the child performer from Ontario is not the next bad example of how to treat the monies they work hard to earn.

Child performers not only spend their days learning their lines and performing them; they also attend tutoring sessions to learn their school work and meet the education curriculum required at their grade level. Their days can be very full, with diverse demands on their learning abilities and their mental and physical capacities, and the loss of time with their friends and families.

One of the appealing things about this bill for the producers is that it is a very low- to no-cost initiative. No matter how big or small the company is, any change to these working conditions are doable. Ensuring that there is a safe, secure room for child performers to be tutored, relax and to learn their lines will be an easy requirement to when selecting a production venue or an easy modification to a current location. To sit down with parents or guardians to set out the terms of employment, tutoring requirements, income protection and hours of work, and confirm adult supervision, is an easy pro forma exercise. Establishing a work schedule to comply with the ages of the performers as set out in the clauses in this bill will become second nature, and it is already practised by many producers.

A well-informed scheduler will be able to ensure that the child performer's day meets the requirements and satisfies the needs of the employer without a strain on the child or the production. In fact, the establishment of these clear rules will make it easier at all levels to engage child performers because the rules are clear and consistent across the industry.

The tutoring requirements are well set out in the bill, along with a clarification of what educational supplies are needed, the times required and the standards that must be met.

As I mentioned earlier, the requirements for income protection are absolutely necessary to ensure that our child performers are properly compensated. How much should be protected and the amount arrived at need further study and resolution, and how that money is handled to ensure that when the child performer reaches the age of 18, their earnings are there for them to manage. I would suggest that the trust be made available to performers past the age of 18, if possible. At that age, there might be a tendency to spend this hard-earned money on current interests rather than what would be good for their future.

In this bill, we want to set out clearly the difference between the working environments of the recorded and live entertainment industries; for example, the need for criminal background checks. Child performers in the

recording industry must have a parent or chaperone with them at every stage of their working day, so the need for the background check is much less.

Speaker, I'm running low on time, but I can tell you that this bill is in-depth. The bill has been put together by ACTRA, Equity, our legislative lawyers and staff. It is extensive and well-written, and I think that the members in this Legislature would be proud to vote for such a bill that would protect young performers in the province of Ontario. We could set an example for the rest of Canada and be leaders on this particular issue.

I'm looking forward to this bill going to third reading and royal assent. I'm sure that all of us in this Legislature want to protect kids in the industry.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: I am very happy to rise and speak in support of this bill today for so many reasons. As a mother of kids who think about getting into the performing arts and being child actors with their friends and so on, and as a former parliamentary assistant to the former Minister of Children and Youth Services, I think it is our responsibility as a government to ensure the safety and support of our young people in any way we can.

I know the member from Hamilton East-Stoney Creek is always passionate about everything that he does. We don't always agree on everything, and that's okay, but he's very passionate. I understand from reading a bit about this bill that it is indeed well researched. He has looked at other jurisdictions, and he has extensive knowledge of what he's talking about in this bill, so I just want to applaud him for bringing forward a well-developed bill.

If it is the will of the Legislature to go to committee, then of course refinements can happen with any bill, but I think this is one of those bills where a lot of homework has been done. That's my read of it, that's my sense of it, and I want to congratulate him on doing that, because he's obviously passionate about it. I think that when we're passionate about things in the Legislature, when we advocate on behalf of our constituents and Ontarians, as he is doing in this case for child performers, that's our job; that is what we're supposed to be doing.

I'll talk a bit about the bill, just to recap, and then—

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Tell us about Fester.

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: There are a few jokes going on in the Legislature today, but this is serious. This is a serious bill. I take the bill seriously. There are a few comments going on, but that's okay.

As I understand it, the bill sets out rules relating to the disclosure of terms of employment, tutoring, income protection, hours of work and adult supervision for child performers. Parts of it would be enforced as part of the Employment Standards Act and would set out rules related to the health and safety of child performers.

The bill also provides that if there's a conflict between a provision of the bill and a provision governing the employment of child performers contained in a collective

agreement, a contract or another act, the provisions that provide the greatest protection to the child performer will prevail. I think that's a really important principle that the member has brought forward in this bill, that whatever provides a stronger form of protection should prevail, because sometimes there's different legislation and people get confused about what applies when and to whom. Having that principle of the strongest protection is the right way to go, for sure.

The bill also provides regulation-making authority on a number of matters, including things like:

- daily expenses of a parent or guardian payable by an employer under the act;
- prescribing persons who are authorized to hold money in trust;
- governing the administration of money held in trust for child performers;
- prescribing employees who are required to have a clean criminal record to be chaperones or supervisors;
- defining what “clean criminal record” means;
- also defining any word or expression that is used in the act but not defined in the act; and
- providing for transitional matters which, in the opinion of the Lieutenant Governor in Council, are necessary or desirable to facilitate the implementation of the act.

Again, it's very thorough and very well thought out.

It is important to note what we do have in place in Ontario, and I don't think the member would mind me highlighting some of these things. There is a Child Performers Guideline in Ontario, and the Ministry of Labour does conduct inspection blitzes for new and young workers, which includes child actors in the entertainment industry. In fact, I've been told that we have a new young worker blitz inspection going on right now. However, that's not to say that more can't be done, that more shouldn't be done, because our government does value the contributions of Ontarians who work in this entertainment industry. And putting on my Minister of Consumer Services hat, we put the highest premium on safety when it comes to Ontarians, and particularly children.

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Some other interesting statistics I learned about: Since 2003, jobs in the entertainment and creative industries have increased by 15%. That represents 39,000 new jobs. That's great. We all want more jobs, but presumably a portion of that represents young child actors, and they're the people that this bill is intending to protect. So I do support the bill moving forward. There are some aspects that we may want to look at and have clarified should this go to committee, such as potentially looking at mental or emotional stress of child performers and how do we provide appropriate supports there, making sure that healthy food and snacks are provided and ensuring travel with chaperones is required.

Ultimately, we feel the bill is well intentioned and addresses a very important issue. I know the member has consulted quite a bit already with stakeholders and I

assume also with industry partners. So I'm sure that would continue if the bill progresses. I think we are all in agreement that whatever we can do to promote the well-being and safety of children is indeed something we can all support. It really is a pleasure indeed to support bills where everyone agrees and everyone can work together to refine, going forward.

With that, I'm looking for my colleague who was supposed to speak for the last six minutes, but maybe I'll just keep going. I'll keep going, how's that? We have one of my colleague ministers speaking, but perhaps I'll just carry on, then.

Interjection.

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: Okay. I'm learning from my learned colleagues—as long as he gets his six minutes back when he comes in the House—

Interjection.

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: Pardon?

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: Go for broke.

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: Go for broke.

Ms. Cindy Forster: Just keep it going.

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: Keep going or sit down? Oh, I'm getting the sit down. I'm going to sit down but again, let me thank the member for bringing the bill forward. I know my colleagues will have more to say on it.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Mrs. Jane McKenna: I'd like to commend the member from Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, first of all. I'm honoured to speak today to Bill 71, the Protecting Child Performers Act, a bill that certainly resonates with me as the PC critic for children and youth.

We live in a very youth-oriented culture, and our young people are often more sophisticated and cultured than we were at that age. They're often more confident in their talents and abilities as well.

Changes in technology and the culture industries has meant that while it's not easy, it's easier than ever to set out that path if that's where your passion lies. But the flip side to all of that historic opportunity and talent is that the potential pitfalls are also very numerous. Bill 71 would introduce rules for dealing with child actors in both the live and the recorded entertainment industries.

Provision would include the mandatory creation of trust funds, something that has been around in the United States since the Jackie Coogan case in the late 1930s. Tutoring for child actors, regulations on working hours, the establishment of break periods and mandatory chaperoning—these are all measures that would appear to enshrine respect for the child performer both as a child and as a performer. This is not to take away from the incredible job that most stage parents do. They may be standing in the wings, but they are just as committed to this path as their children.

We've set aside a space in our culture for the hockey parents or the soccer parents but for some reason, maybe because they don't assemble in public quite so regularly,

we don't put stage parents on the same level. They are in many cases dedicated to their children's dreams.

One of my constituents, Donna Gosling, mother of Ryan Gosling, was a level-headed presence during the outset of her son's career. Ryan began his career on the Mickey Mouse Club as part of a cast of future superstars like Britney Spears and Justin Timberlake. He was naturally a bit wilful and Donna was very patient. Even while we pay tribute to the parents, we must acknowledge that this industry can distort reality, that they can be star-struck as much as anyone.

As much as Bill 71 is about protecting the interests of the child from predatory industry influence, it also contains measures that would potentially act as a buffer against some parents who often have the best intentions—they just want their child to enjoy greater opportunities and richer life experiences, grow their talent and work with amazing people—but are perhaps overeager and push their child beyond reason.

Currently, child labour is illegal in Ontario, with the notable exclusion of the entertainment industry. The proponents of this bill argue that because of this exclusion, additional regulation is needed. The proponents fail to note any cases where this regulation would have prevented any sort of misdeeds or transgressions from taking place.

That's not to say there isn't room for improvement, debate and scrutiny, but I'm happy to support this bill and look forward to delving into it at committee.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: I first want to acknowledge, again, the presence of Shirley Douglas—we are so honoured—and all the phenomenal members of ACTRA who have come back time and time again to support this, and also the rights of workers in the arts. Thank you for being here. Give them a round of applause.

Applause.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: My little speech is going to be called “Confessions of a Child Actress,” because I was one, and when you talk about stage mothers, I had one. She was a stage mother to beat all stage mothers.

I remember, at the tender age of three or four, being taken out to model, to go on auditions. I had several little, minimal parts and various advertising moments on television. It was one of those scenes that you've seen in the movies, where you open the door of the audition and three mothers fall in because they all have their ears at the door.

I have to say that I remember to this day the sheer terror and horror of those auditions. I know that my mother meant well; it wasn't that she didn't mean well. She really wanted the best for me, but it was terrifying. I don't know many performers who love to go on auditions, quite frankly, but imagine what that feels like for a little kid. It's scary: “Go on, go on. Do your best. Smile.” I remember having to smile so hard that my cheeks hurt. I remember that very well.

My mother was very proud, though, because it all culminated in me actually getting a job in an ongoing

series; you know, that's the kind of gold ring for many performers. It was called *Time of Your Life*. It was on CBC, and I was a dancer. I think Peter Kastner was one of the stars on that show.

Every Wednesday, through an entire school year, I went from 8 in the morning until about 5 or 6 at night, and it was dancing.

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: No school?

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: No school whatsoever. So we rehearsed, and we rehearsed hard. I was like nine or 10 at the time. When I think back about it, there was no chaperone, there was no parent on the set, there were no courses given. I missed one day of school every week for an entire year. Now, did I enjoy some of it? Absolutely. But, my goodness, it was hard work.

Then, one might ask, where did the money go? I don't know. Honestly, I don't know. Now, I'm not accusing my parents, who have long since passed away, of anything. I'm sure they had my best interest at heart. But I don't know. I had lots of performances and lots of ads that continued to run. Where are all those residuals? I don't know.

Suffice to say, I support this bill. Not only do I support it, but we tabled it before, back in 2007—six years ago. We in the New Democratic Party tabled this bill before, and a bill for actors' rights. So I really herald the member from Hamilton East—Stoney Creek for bringing it back again. This time, I think we're going to be lucky—I think we're going to be lucky—because this time we're in a minority government, where we have a little bit more push, a little bit more say.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Especially New Democrats. We've got a whole bunch of push.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: Especially. We had quite a bit of push and quite a bit of say this last budget time.

So I hope—I live in hope—that the Minister of Labour is going to do the right thing and is going to move on this finally, because, as you heard the member from Hamilton East—Stoney Creek say, it's not good enough to have guidelines. Guidelines have no legal—they don't really even have moral—weight. They're something that's just a piece of paper on your desk. It's the enforcement. It's the law that makes the difference, and then, of course, the enforcement. So that's important.

1520

It's extremely important to codify this; it's extremely important to move on this, because I know there are lots of kids out there who are going through the same reality I went through, and let me tell you, it turned me off acting forever—unless you count this as acting. It turned me off acting; it turned me off auditions, that's for sure. Because not only was I doing all of that—the classic stage mother that she was—I was also taking violin, modelling—I was just writing down all the things I used to take—acting, ballet. I literally had a class every night of the week after school, plus doing the work that I did. That's very stage mother; come on, that's very stage mother.

Now, there are some children who love to do that, who want to do that. I wasn't one of them. It's the kids like

me you've got to protect—and all the kids, even the ones who love doing it; you've got to protect the money they earn doing it. This is only fair, because not all parents have the best intentions of their children at heart. Unfortunately, we know that to be true.

Again, it's absolutely important that we support this, absolutely important that we get it passed this time—and not just passed today, but please, my friends in the Liberal Party, in the government, please make this a law so that these poor people don't have to come back in another six years to see the same sometimes-not-great performances take place.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Hon. Glen R. Murray: It's a great pleasure to rise in support of this bill and also in support of the efforts of my friend from Hamilton East—Stoney Creek. He always brings the perspective of the people who are forgotten, obviously. I think his pretty unrelenting commitment to social justice and human equality is reflected in this bill, and I want to thank him.

He also has a certain acting flair in the House. I don't think any of us will ever forget the dramatic moments when Mr. Miller rises to support a government bill. It's got the attention—he's developed almost standing ovations on this side of the House for the drama and the portrayal of the put-upon member of the opposition. I just have a sense that there is something in Mr. Miller's childhood he hasn't quite shared with all of us right now. I'm going to look at all those ads on Star Trek, from when we were kids, to see if I can see a little Paul on a Campbell Soup ad or something similar.

I also want to join my friends opposite and the member for Parkdale—High Park to acknowledge Ms. Douglas. She is a great Canadian, a great artist and a great voice for social justice. Ms. Douglas, on behalf of the government and Premier Wynne, we'd also like to join our friends the New Democrats in welcoming you here. We all live a better life in Canada in a more just society because of your leadership. Thank you very much.

My son and Ms. Douglas's son had a brief encounter that led to my son being in a movie. I was running for mayor. I had started a film office when I was a city councillor in Winnipeg, and we had a very robust film industry, which I was quite proud of—we quadrupled the amount of money for arts and culture. One of the big things was this film, and the big crescendo of this was Kiefer Sutherland was coming to town to do a movie, which in Winnipeg is about as big as it possibly gets.

When he was there, I was in an election campaign shortly thereafter the time the movie got shot. I was running for mayor, and he and Michael Moriarty co-hosted a fundraiser for me. Michael Moriarty, you might know as Ben Stone, the original crown—

Interjections.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: Yes.

I always thought he was a really progressive guy, and I found he is somewhere right of, you now, the Repub-

lican Party—hated Janet Reno and didn't like Bill Clinton. I tried to carefully avoid talking politics. Fortunately, Mr. Sutherland was much more progressive and enlightened, and we had a lot more fun together.

Mr. Rick Nicholls: Great word, “progressive.” I like that.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: Yes. Well, I remember when your party was.

Interjections.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: Sorry. After question period today, you've got to expect we're going to shoot a few shots back.

Mr. Rick Nicholls: Just remember I'm speaking next.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: I'm sure.

But it was interesting because, as some of you may know—and this is where the child actor part comes in and why I think these measures are so protected—my son, Michael, when he was 19, did a documentary about his childhood called *A Kind of Family*. It was about his struggle with HIV and fetal alcohol syndrome. I think he thought he was going to be Kiefer Sutherland, but with that kind of mentoring, the kind of connection he had, he was able to go on and talk about child abuse. If you ever have a chance to see this film, you'll understand why my son is my hero.

But going through the decisions about the kinds of personal disclosure that a child went through, and I said to him—it was actually the child service agency, where one of the young people there was a filmmaker who really wanted to do that. I said, “Don't do it because if you tell your story, you have to live with it for the rest of your life, and it's public.” He said, “I've spent my entire life being controlled by foster parents and defined by other people. The kids like me on the street never get to tell our side of the story.” It's a transformative film. He's one of the few kids—my son recovered from a drug addiction. He's now a carpenter and doing very, very well as a young man, and I'm enormously proud of him. I couldn't have gone through what he's gone through in his life, and I was devoutly honoured and overwhelmed being his parent, going through with my friends what he went through and what he taught me about patience, maturity and courage.

But he was 19 when he did this, and I said, “You can't decide to do this. You have to wait a year. You have to talk to a lawyer. You have to do all of that.” But the impact of having young people tell their own stories in the first person is an incredibly powerful thing. Whether it's fictional, which many of these stories are about, or whether it's a fact-based documentary, we have to go a little extra further to protect young people to do that.

I want to say to my friends opposite—I've only got 10 seconds left—you will certainly have all my support and, I think, all members on this. I want to congratulate the New Democrats, who have really used this minority government to advance things. I would invite the official opposition to bring forward more constructive ideas and a little less criticism, and we'll get a lot more done.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Mr. Rick Nicholls: I appreciate the comments the minister has made with regard to his son.

With regard to bringing forth bills that would really help to advance this particular Legislature, I think we have done our best to try to advance it as well. Unfortunately, the other two parties don't seem to think, feel or believe that way.

It is my pleasure to rise this afternoon to speak to Bill 71, the Protecting Child Performers Act.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: They're buying their own spin now.

Mr. Rick Nicholls: You might want to listen to this. You might learn.

I want to thank, first of all, the member from Hamilton East—Stoney Creek for introducing this bill, and I must mention that the member from Parkdale—High Park also introduced a similar bill back in 2007.

There's a saying that, “All the world's a stage” and we're just merely players as we pass through. I could have said something else, that all the world's a black tuxedo and this coalition is a pair of brown shoes, but I won't say that.

On a more serious note, I do support this bill at second reading and we hope to see the bill examined closely in committee to ensure—

Mr. Gilles Bisson: You're not even wearing sandals.

Mr. Rick Nicholls: May I finish, Mr. NDPER, or would you like to have the floor?

Again, because I'm sure he missed this statement, I will support this bill at second reading, all right? But I hope to see it examined more closely at committee—by the way, if we do have committees, and I certainly hope that does happen over the summer.

First and foremost, we need to confirm that it properly protects children, and that's very important. Secondly, it should allow child actors to fully benefit from their careers.

We've done a little digging into this issue and tried to find some examples of misdeeds occurring in Ontario because of a lack of legislation. There does not seem to be many cases where abuses have occurred due to the lack of definitive law, but Ontario certainly has a thriving entertainment industry which will surely grow as the world comes to realize what this province has to offer.

Many American states have legislation to protect child actors, most notably in California, which should come as no surprise, as Hollywood is of course the entertainment capital of the world. This bill includes a good number of measures that these states have adopted over the years. I'd just simply like to briefly highlight a couple of them.

California currently requires that three hours per day are required on set on school days for child actors. This bill calls for a minimum of two hours, which is certainly reasonable and indeed crucial for our youth. This bill also seeks to place a limit on the number of hours a child in the entertainment industry—with the same rules from age two to 17. What that means simply is this: That someone

at 17 certainly is much different than one who is two years old, and they may be capable and willing to work much longer hours. New York has a graduated system that lays out different standards for different ages, which may be an approach worth considering.

1530

Subsection 14(1) of this bill helps protect against any potential abuse. The subsection states, "A parent, guardian, or authorized chaperone of a child performer" under the age of 16 "shall be present at the workplace and ... accessible to the child ... at all times."

Lastly, and this is what I believe will have the greatest impact, at least 25% of funds will be held in trust until the child turns 18 years of age. That's a great idea. This is similar to the Coogan Act, named after a child star in the 1930s whose parents spent his fortune before he turned 18. His earnings would have been roughly \$50 million by today's standards. This is a widely used law in the States, which would help to prevent such things from happening in Ontario.

I applaud the member from Hamilton East-Stoney Creek for doing his part to protect children in this province. Children are our most precious resource, and at the same time, they're also our most vulnerable. While working in the entertainment industry can provide many opportunities for youth, their safety is paramount. It's for these reasons that we must do all we can to protect them.

Speaker, yes, we will be supporting this bill at second reading.

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: Further debate?

Mr. John O'Toole: It's a pleasure to respectfully speak on behalf of our party, but also to respect the work that Mr. Miller, the member from Hamilton East-Stoney Creek, as well as his colleague from Parkdale-High Park, have put into this issue. I also want to recognize Shirley Douglas, as well as the other celebrities—famous, young and old—who are here today. Thank you very much for coming and supporting this cause in support of children.

I think it's also important to put on the record that our party, however vilified from time to time, does put children first. And I would say we put the economy first as well. I think it's also important to recognize that in the 2007 provincial election, this was a plank in our party platform.

It's not an issue that I'm unfamiliar with, as a parent with five children, all of them talented. Being a parent—I'm speaking directly to the parents here—you want the best for your children, and I think all the legislators here do as well, despite the politics that rattle back and forth here. I would also say that we believe that children deserve protection over and above adults. In many ways, this bill does that, and that's why we'll clearly be supporting it without any ambiguity at all.

I would also say that I went to the press conference at noon—I thought it was very well done. I commend the member for professionally giving voice to the issues, the young actors who spoke and the comments made. I think that's why legislators here and private members should keep the partisan stuff out of it a bit and try to be doing

the right thing. Who here would speak against protecting children?

I think it's important also to recognize that perhaps we'd all agree it would go to public hearings. Although the bill is quite substantive—in terms of a private member's bill it is very well developed. I could commend you for that, and legislative counsel, who helped you put that together.

I also want to commend the people here from ACTRA and the providers, the Equity association, because you've had a loud voice in this, I can tell. I heard a parent of one of the younger actors—I gather you're an actress, or certainly involved as a parent—who spoke at the press conference this afternoon of the importance of making sure that children receive the full life. That's the protection that is in this bill, specifically the provision in, I think, sections 3 and 4, which talks about the fact that they would have employment opportunities but they'd also have opportunities for tutoring and supervision within the provisions of this legislation. It's my understanding that it would make permanent amendments to the Employment Standards Act.

With that, I'm going to leave a bit of time for one of my other colleagues to make comments on this bill.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, member for Hamilton East.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: I want to first thank Paul Miller, our critic for culture and heritage, for doing this work. It's important work. It's consistent with what my colleague Cheri DiNovo has done in that role in the past. We really appreciate this. And I want to thank ACTRA and Equity for all the work they've done over the years to move this agenda forward.

Speaker, in Greek mythology there was a figure, Sisyphus, who was doomed through eternity to roll a boulder up a hill through the whole day; it would get to the top of the hill and roll back down. Sisyphus did not have the commitment that ACTRA and Equity do, clearly.

They have done extraordinary work; they have never stopped advocating for the rights of artists and certainly for the rights of child performers and their parents. I'm hopeful, given what has been said in this chamber this afternoon, that the boulder will get to the top of the hill and will stay there this time.

To everyone who made this possible, in particular to our critic, to Equity, to ACTRA, my thanks, and my hope, Speaker, that we all vote for this bill and get it through to committee and to third reading.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Mr. Taras Natyshak: I'm pleased to rise today on behalf of our caucus to applaud the work that my colleague the member from Hamilton East-Stoney Creek has done in bringing forward this bill.

I'm also pleased to rise as our party's labour critic, because this bill, in essence, is a labour bill. We are

talking about child actors, but we are talking about workers. They are professionals, they are artists, they are entertainers that put a lot of effort and skill into their craft, and are rewarded as if it was a full-time job—sometimes it's a part-time job, but as a real industry that needs protection. It's one of the most glaring aspects in our Employment Standards Act and our health and safety act that child performers aren't recognized. They are given minimal, minimal recognition, and those that do exist typically are recognized under provisions of collective agreements.

I want to applaud—I'll roll some credits here right now—ACTRA and Equity, who are setting the tone, really, for protection of young workers and young actors in this country and in this province, and I commend them for doing so.

We are obviously, as has been mentioned, privileged to have Shirley Douglas among us today. In meeting with representatives from ACTRA, I was told a story that I think should shed some light on this subject for members of the assembly.

On set, on one of the productions Shirley was working on, there were a number of actors and child actors. Throughout the production and the filming, those young actors had to go and embark on their tutoring, and were taken away off set to go and to have their classroom lesson. Now Shirley, being the inquisitive, labour-minded, social justice activist that she is, decided to figure out where these young people were being taught, and asked if she could see exactly what the location was and to see what the conditions were. Lo and behold, she walked into what essentially was a Quonset hut that had some makeshift tables set up and a study area that was in the same area as the paint shop was, where the film crew, not on their own accord, certainly had no other room but to set up their paint shop in the same area that they taught young people. To Shirley's credit: My dear, you shut that place down immediately, and those young workers were taken out of that dangerous scenario.

This just simply highlights one incident where this bill, among many other things, can play a supportive role in protecting the lives of young workers and honouring the good work that they do.

Mr. Speaker, I would be remiss if I didn't acknowledge that I have a little bit of a vested interest here, and I'm very proud of the fact that I have a relative, my little nephew, Carson Reaume, who's an aspiring actor and actually will be featured in an episode of *Rookie Blue* this week. So it's really cool that I get to stand here and deliver to the cameras—and I know it adds 10 or 20 pounds onto me, because everyone tells me. I know who's watching, you've been sending me texts; I know who's watching—

Interjection.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: It's 30 or 40? Okay.

But I also am able to do something here that actually has a tangible effect outside of the walls of this chamber. We all have that opportunity to do that here today. I'm just so proud to see a bill come forward that has so much

common sense built into it. It will have such an immediate effect and will really modernize our standards in film and television and media in this country, and bring us, really, to the standards that we should have as a world-class entertainment and artist-driven district that promotes the arts and also supports them, not only culturally, not only as members of the community, but also legislatively. We recognize that these workers add so much value to our communities and to our spirit. We can do something, and we're doing it here today. I'm very proud to rise today, and I encourage all members of the chamber to support this incredible bill.

1540

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate.

Mrs. Julia Munro: I just want to add a couple of comments. While I am not a child in the way that the member for Parkdale—High Park explained her experiences, at the same time my nephew has been a member of ACTRA. Currently he's not, but he was for many years. It was through his experiences as a young child that it became very clear to my sister and me that there was an opportunity and a demand for some further kind of regulatory environment for children to work in.

She was particularly struck not by the producers so much as the overambitious parents and the manner in which they were prepared to make sure their kid was in front of the camera for however long it took. So on behalf of those people, I want to add my voice in supporting this bill.

As the former culture critic for our party, I did work on the initiative that came out in the 2007 platform, which was, in fact, to provide this kind of legislative framework for children in this province. Thank you very much for giving us the opportunity to demonstrate our continued support.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member for Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, you have two minutes.

Mr. Paul Miller: I'd like to thank the Minister of Consumer Services, the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation, the members from Chatham—Kent—Essex, Durham, Burlington, Parkdale—High Park, Toronto—Danforth, Essex and York—Simcoe for their kind words.

I'd also like to thank them for their common bond. We all share something in this House. We all share the values of protecting the children and the young people of our province. I think that all party partisan politics will go out the door when it comes to voting for this bill all the way along. I think we've finally arrived, and we all realize it's time to move on this legislation. I'm looking forward to working with all parties to make this a reality.

But as it often happens, there are enough instances of poor- or ill-considered conditions for child performers that we must formalize their treatment at work. We must protect them, and we will protect them. I feel really good about this.

Speaker, in closing, I would be remiss if I didn't thank Shirley Douglas and the other ACTRA and Equity

performers and staff who have taken the time out of their busy lives to come to Queen's Park today to support the passage of Bill 71. I particularly want to thank Equity, ACTRA and our legislative counsel for their hours and hours of hard work, even on weekends.

This bill before us today is a good thing. It is always a pleasure in this House when we can all agree on something that's good for the people of Ontario, something that's going to protect the citizens of our province, something that's going to show the rest of the country we're taking a leading role when it comes to labour law and to health and safety. I'm very excited. I really believe we can take this to the finish line with all three parties.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): I will take the vote at the end of private members' public business.

FAIRNESS AND COMPETITIVENESS IN ONTARIO'S CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY ACT, 2013

LOI DE 2013 SUR L'ÉQUITÉ ET LA COMPÉTITIVITÉ DANS L'INDUSTRIE ONTARIENNE DE LA CONSTRUCTION

Mr. McNaughton moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 74, An Act to amend the Labour Relations Act, 1995 to alter bargaining rights conferred by pre-1980 working agreements in the construction industry / Projet de loi 74, Loi modifiant la Loi de 1995 sur les relations de travail pour modifier le droit de négocier conféré par des accords de fait conclus avant 1980 dans l'industrie de la construction.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Pursuant to standing order 98, the member has 12 minutes for his presentation.

Mr. Monte McNaughton: I'm pleased to rise this afternoon to speak to my bill, Bill 74, the Fairness and Competitiveness in Ontario's Construction Industry Act.

Speaker, over the past decade, Ontario has experienced extraordinary economic decline. The facts speak for themselves: 600,000 people unemployed, rapidly escalating energy prices, historic deficits and a doubling of the provincial debt that will both stifle job creation and burden future generations.

While we all know these facts well, more troubling trends are becoming apparent. Over the past decade, Ontario has experienced a net loss of leading global companies. Despite prolonged unemployment, the province faces unprecedented skilled-labour shortages. Ineffective economic development programs continue, even though they have failed to deliver results. This is the current government's record, and this is Ontario's future if we stay on the same path that we're on today.

You see, we now face a critical choice about our future: Either we implement the sensible policies that will help create jobs and prosperity, or we accept a future

of high debt, declining public services and living below our economic potential.

I am bringing Bill 74 before this House in order to address a newly uncovered loophole that has recently been found. This loophole is putting an established Ontario construction firm at a decided disadvantage in bidding for industrial, commercial and institutional contracts outside of the city of Toronto.

I envision a province known for its ingenuity, inventiveness and innovation, but to achieve that, we must work with our entrepreneurial hubs and support those who are driving growth and innovation. We must support those who are creating jobs and helping to grow our economy, and that is why I am pleased to be bringing forward this important piece of legislation here today.

This established general contractor is now under threat. This is a company that is widely known as a community leader in London, and a company that has earned significant acclaim, including being named 2013's number two best employer in Canada by Aon Hewitt, and a platinum member of Canada's 50 Best Managed Companies, and one of Canada's top 100 employers in 2013 by Mediabase Canada.

Speaker, a single working agreement that was made all the way back in 1958 is now being dredged up, and a recent unfair decision by the Ontario Labour Relations Board puts their future at risk and threatens the viability of this very important contractor. The agreement from 1958 puts EllisDon at a significant disadvantage, compared to foreign competitors who are neither bound nor obligated to follow through with these types of agreements, and it is this un-level and uneven playing field that my bill seeks to address. Simply put, we need to update the system before this ancient labour law chases jobs out of Ontario.

I have often commented in this House about the need for a level playing field for businesses to succeed on their own merits, and I have said that it is time for government to stop picking and choosing winners and losers, and to get away from the government corporate-welfare-and-subsidy model. This bill furthers this goal, and will help ensure a level playing field for all general contractors operating in Ontario.

The OLRB has set a deadline to comply with their ruling. This timeline gave the company just enough time to seek a legislative remedy to this unfair situation, and that is what we are trying to do here today with this Bill 74. It is important to note that this act only applies to the 1958 working agreement. This is a simple and straightforward bill designed to resolve a specific loophole that has recently been uncovered.

As you can see, Ontario law is crippling this Ontario-based job creator. EllisDon is being forced to abide by an unfair OLRB ruling that affects all of their operations in the province that are outside of Toronto. The winners will be new and foreign companies, which will be able to bid on contracts at a much cheaper rate. This will not only impact construction jobs, but it will also impact head office jobs as well.

1550

Speaker, I don't think I need to remind you that EllisDon has a head office in London, where we are currently looking at a 10% unemployment rate. Not only do we need to create jobs and grow the economy in London, but we also need to keep and maintain the important jobs we already have. Quite clearly, it is in the best interests of Ontario to ensure that all businesses operate on a level playing field against new and foreign competitors. Bill 74 ensures that everyone in the industry is playing on a level playing field. With a fair environment to operate in, EllisDon will continue its operations in Ontario and will continue to create good jobs across the province, while also taking a leading and active role supporting our communities and, importantly, the city of London.

It's important that the companies in Ontario that provide good jobs for the hard-working men and women of this province are not crippled by unfair legislation and odd legal loopholes, but rather placed in an environment that is fair for all. If this Legislature fails to pass this legislation, this Ontario company could be forced out of its core business, ultimately resulting in more job losses in this province, more unemployed people adding to the 600,000 currently unemployed in Ontario today.

That is 600,000 men and women who woke up in the morning with no job to go to and no paycheque coming home to their bank account—but that's not all. Over the past decade, Ontario has lost 300,000 good jobs in the manufacturing sector, but at the same time, we saw 300,000 more added to an already bloated government payroll. Soon the only industry left in Ontario will be government.

Speaker, if you look at the StatsCan data from the last year, the government sector has grown by 48,000 jobs, but we haven't seen a single net new job to the private sector. In fact, fewer people are working outside the government, paying for more people working inside the government with higher wages, benefits and pensions than those who are paying the taxes. We have to do everything we can to preserve jobs in the private sector and grow Ontario's economy. We cannot allow for local Ontario companies to be placed at a decided disadvantage due to unfair legislation, and we cannot allow foreign and new companies to play by a completely different set of rules.

The only way forward is to move confidently and boldly in the direction of the plan that you know is right. Ignoring the issues Ontario is facing is not solving the problem. With my bill here today, this House has an opportunity to solve a problem and help keep jobs in Ontario.

The approach of this House needs to be one that creates jobs and keeps Ontario businesses in Ontario. We must stand up for jobs and protect the jobs and businesses that are in this great province. I believe that we can rebuild our economy for the 21st century and recreate a strong, growing and confident middle class. Our big advantage is that Ontario has more of the greatest

resource there is, and that's people. It is these people's knowledge, ideas and hard work that will take Ontario back to the top in Canada.

This bill is a simple solution to a specific problem, and I am asking that all members join with me in standing up for good jobs across Ontario. Bill 74 helps keep jobs in Ontario, at home where they belong.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Mr. Taras Natyshak: I'm pleased to rise to speak on Bill 74, Fairness and Competitiveness in Ontario's Construction Industry. I spoke briefly with the member who initiated the bill. On the surface, I see what he's trying to do. I see that the company is under an agreement that binds them that predates, I think, everybody in this House. It dates back to 1958—maybe not Monte—

Interjection: The other one.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: —but certainly that Monte. And I wonder actually what precipitated the initiation of that agreement in the first place. I'd like to look at some of the aspects that brought about that master agreement.

All in all, if we look at the preamble or the explanatory position of the note—as New Democrats, we read this and it goes against our fundamental beliefs in terms of the right to collectively bargain and enter into a negotiated contract with an employer. "The bill amends the Labour Relations Act, 1995 to end bargaining rights recognized and conferred by certain working agreements entered into before May 1, 1979 between an employer and a council of trade unions." I'll spare you the rest, but the employer is EllisDon, one of the largest construction companies in Canada, certainly a reputable constructor, one that has a stellar record in its workplace, in its competency and quality. There's no question about that. And that has been reflected dating back to the most recent profit points that I can find: In 2010, they made \$3.39 billion that year in revenue, which is quite impressive. That's amazing. They build a lot of great stuff here in the ICI sector.

I can't imagine that this aspect, by circumventing the OLRB and a collective agreement through this legislative body, will make them any more profitable than they currently are. I couldn't imagine that they could be less profitable. They have a stellar record, they had good contractual relationships with different trades and they're highly regarded, not only in this country but abroad.

To take that extra step, again, to circumvent what would normally be the process through the OLRB—if the concept here is to get out of this collective agreement, then they would go about a decertification process. I don't know if that has been exhausted yet or not. There are a lot of missing components to this bill that I need to know, but just on the surface, as I stated, it looks as though, in order to comply or in order to get them out of this contract, they have to do it through this legislative body before the time runs out under the clauses of the OLRB decision. This is the first that I've seen any really comprehensive view of this bill. In my opinion, it doesn't merit our intervention. It doesn't merit our intervention

on a lot of levels because, as much of a surprise as this might come to those at the OLRB, imagine the surprise it would come as to those workers who are under a collective agreement working for EllisDon that, tomorrow morning, no longer are they actually signatory to an agreement with them—something that this body initiated. I couldn't imagine that would be something that any member would want to do.

I'm pleased to hear arguments around it. I think the member is also looking to elaborate on it. I hope the opposition does as well, because I believe they signalled that they are going to be supportive—sorry. One day they're going to be the opposition again. But the government is going to be elaborating on it. I welcome some more information on this, and I welcome any opportunity that we can find to work in a fair and balanced way to enhance construction and infrastructure in this province, and balancing the rights of workers, and to uphold our laws as they relate to labour relations.

The member did bring about one aspect that I'd like to quickly touch on: ever-increasing competition from outside jurisdictions and from construction conglomerates coming in and bidding on our projects. I would ask him to—I'm not going to talk to him; I'm going to talk through you, Speaker, to the member who initiated the bill. I agree that the pressures from multinational corporations, specifically in the construction industry, that are able to come into Ontario and other jurisdictions and undercut our home-built industries and companies—there is no question that that's a threat. That's also what the member would agree is probably a component of a free market economy, one that they are proponents of, one that their party certainly champions through free trade agreements such as CETA, which absolutely opens the door to not only construction companies coming in but any other service provider that would fundamentally alter a municipality's ability to bid and to support their local businesses.

1600

I hope that the member can square that circle for me, because the real threat here certainly is in the opening of our borders to multinationals that have been given free rein, through free trade agreements, to undercut. That presents a real and present danger to our construction companies and any other business that's based in Canada—to compete.

Instead of bringing the bar down—we're no longer outsourcing; they're insourcing cheap labour under the Temporary Foreign Worker Program, and we saw that explode quite dramatically just as of late—let's take a look at those aspects where we can protect Canadian and Ontario workers. We can protect Ontario businesses from those foreign competitors through good, savvy, well-nuanced legislation, both at the provincial and federal levels.

Mr. Speaker, my colleague the member from Timmins–James Bay wants to add to this, as well.

Again, I don't think this is coming at us fully nuanced. I think it's something that has a cloak of—not secrecy,

but it isn't clear to me why we need this legislative body to intervene so dramatically to circumvent a decision that has clearly been put before the OLRB.

Merci, monsieur le Président. J'apprécie votre temps aujourd'hui.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Mr. Steven Del Duca: As I think I say almost every time that I stand—maybe because I'm still a relative newcomer here—it is a pleasure for me to be standing here today in my place, on behalf of my constituents and my community and, at least in this particular instance, on behalf of our caucus, to speak to Bill 74 and to provide my perspective on it.

Before I actually discuss the bill itself and get into some of the reasons why it's important for this Legislature to continue to support Ontario's homegrown infrastructure and construction industry, there is one point—and I don't normally start with the last, but there is one thing that I do want to reference regarding something I heard the member from Essex say. I understand where he's coming from, and I understand that there are concerns and that perhaps there's, at least at this stage, a little bit of a lack of clarity or a lack of understanding, if I could suggest, on their part as to what this bill is all about. I think that's exactly why it's important at this particular moment for this bill to be passed at second reading and for it to go to committee beyond today: so that all members of this House, representing all three caucuses, can seek the kind of additional analysis and input, ask the questions that they're looking to ask and get a better understanding of this particular process.

I would say to the member from Essex, as is probably clear from my comments so far, that I am supporting this bill. I think it needs to move forward to committee, and we need to make sure, as I said at the very outset, that we find a way through this legislative chamber to make sure that Ontario's world-class infrastructure and construction industry continues to flourish.

Members who have been here over the last little while will know that I introduced my very first private member's bill just a few weeks ago. It was a bill that does relate to the construction industry in Ontario. It was Bill 69, regarding prompt payment. The reason I mention that, Mr. Speaker, is to underscore how important the construction industry is to my particular community, to my particular region and also to me as an individual.

In my comments around Bill 69, I mentioned that in my own family there was a long history of being employed by Ontario's construction industry, from my grandfather to my father to my uncle to me, working as a summer student on construction sites around the GTA and having the opportunity to see first-hand how crucial it is for tens of thousands of families across Ontario to make sure that those jobs are available and that people can continue to build their lives and have the kind of quality of life that they deserve to have in this province.

Though I am quite happy and proud to support moving this bill to committee, I hope that the member who

introduced the bill, the member from Lambton-Kent-Middlesex, will understand that while I support the thrust of this bill and want to see it go to committee, I probably couldn't disagree more strongly with some of the rhetoric and some of the preamble that found its way into his comments today.

Over the last 10 years, given the billions of dollars that we have invested in crucial public infrastructure here in the province of Ontario, we have been able to create tens of thousands of jobs. We've kept the economy moving forward. But it's important to note that the government alone—any government alone—cannot do that. Government can help find and create the conditions to enable those in private industry to help move forward, and that, through our infrastructure spending and investments, is one of the things that we've done extremely successfully.

In the case of the particular company that this bill, at least in part, is regarding, EllisDon, which I have to say is really and truly—and this was mentioned by the member from Essex and I believe by the member from Lambton-Kent-Middlesex—a world-class construction company and infrastructure company, having built projects right around the province of Ontario and having done so at an exceptionally top-quality level over many, many years, I think it's important to note that while we have provided the investments for infrastructure, we have done so in partnership with infrastructure companies like EllisDon and many, many others that are, frankly, models for the entire world when it comes to infrastructure.

In previous aspects of my career, I have heard from individuals involved in the construction industry from beyond Ontario's borders, beyond Canada's borders, who have a very clear understanding and appreciation for the kind of construction and infrastructure project and product that we produce here in the province of Ontario, again thanks in large part to the decisions made by this government since 2003 but also because of the kind of expertise of companies like EllisDon. And there are others: Eastern Construction, PCL, and many others that do significant work here in the province of Ontario, building our hospitals, building our schools, building community centres, building universities, building so much of the crucial public infrastructure that we need. It's important that we, I believe, at every turn do our very best to make sure that we find a way to support those kinds of Ontario-based, in particular, homegrown infrastructure projects.

The member from Essex did talk about the threat we face from infrastructure companies from beyond our borders. It's a very real threat. Have a conversation with anyone from the infrastructure community that's based here in Ontario and you will hear about that threat.

I know that I'm sharing my time on our side with the member from Willowdale. The only thing I will say—because my time is running out and there is so much I'd like to say about this bill—is that one of the reasons it does need to move forward at this point in time is if the members from the third party had had a chance to review the labour board decision, they would understand that the

labour board understood in its decision—in fact, it stated in its decision that it was perfectly all right, perfectly acceptable, for those involved in this to seek a legislative response to their decision. They placed a deadline on that, and the deadline was very early in the year 2014.

Given the way this Legislature works, given the way all Legislatures work, it is important to get this bill moved through second reading; get it moved to committee; get it dealt with at committee; have the members from the third party, the members from the official opposition and members from the industry and the public comment; go through that process and, I would say, get it back here for third reading. Get it back, get it approved, so that EllisDon and, I would argue, I would say, any other company that might in the future encounter a similar technical difficulty—provide them with the opportunity and the vehicle to seek the resolution they need.

I'm going to finish by saying once again it's really important for this chamber to focus on making sure that we support Ontario's homegrown infrastructure industry. That's what this bill in large part helps to do. I would call on all members through all three parties—on behalf of all three parties, I should say—to strongly support this bill and get it to committee.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate? The member for Elgin—Middlesex.

Mr. Jeff Yurek: Thank you, Speaker, for acknowledging me. I'm pleased to have the opportunity to speak on this bill, the Fairness and Competitiveness in Ontario's Construction Industry Act.

I'd like to sum up: The goal of this bill at the end of the day is job creation. We talk a lot in this House about the dismal job situation in which Ontario finds itself. It wasn't too long ago that Ontario was the economic engine of this country, a place where everybody wanted to live and grow, and a place that had lots of opportunity to create one's living. Now we're at a place where we have 600,000 people out of work.

My riding of Elgin—Middlesex—London has been drastically hit over the last five years, where we now have over 6,300 jobs lost in our manufacturing sector. In my area, London and area, the unemployment rate has hit 9.9%.

If we look at the construction industry alone, it employs over 400,000 people. A healthy construction sector is very vital to the economic prosperity of job creation, yet our province has restrictive trade ratios, mandatory WSIB coverage and the College of Trades, which is keeping our young people out of this job market and shutting them out of this province.

With this bill today, my colleague is putting forward legislation that is a step in the right direction for job growth. This bill stems from a recently uncovered deficiency in the Labour Relations Act that puts Ontario general contractors at a competitive disadvantage. Certain hiring restrictions mean out-of-province contractors that don't have to abide by such restrictions are given a leg up when bidding against Ontario firms for ICI contracts.

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The effect of these restrictions arises from an obscure agreement that was made over 60 years ago. I think we can agree that a lot has changed since the 1950s and this is an outdated piece of legislation or agreement. After all, why do we want outdated policies deliberately giving out-of-province contractors an advantage over our Ontario construction companies?

Ontario boasts some of the best contracting firms in Canada. We want them to create jobs and we want them to thrive. We're not talking about favouring Ontario contractors over the others; all we want is our contracting firms to compete on a level playing field. This bill will fix that problem, enhance market competitiveness and contribute to a healthy construction sector. And a healthy construction sector, Mr. Speaker, will create jobs.

This is a small step, but, as I said earlier, it's a step in the right direction. I commend my colleague from Lambton-Kent-Middlesex for bringing it forward, and I encourage everyone here to support this bill so we can rectify this problem and move on. After all, we do have a lot of work ahead of us to reverse the current job-killing policies in this government. For instance, we need to get to work on the trades ratios and reduce them to 1 to 1. We need to remove the compulsory WSIB coverage and allow construction companies to buy workplace insurance in the private market. Finally, we need to dismantle the College of Trades.

Let's pass Bill 74 so we can focus on these other things.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Mr. Speaker, no surprise that a New Democrat will not vote for this particular bill, and I just want to lay out a couple of reasons why.

First of all, let me just say this: What we've seen in North America and we've seen in Ontario, as in a lot of other parts of the western world, is the middle class shrinking more and more. One of the reasons for that is the loss of unionized jobs within our economy. One of the things that we've been very successful at over the last 50 or 60 years in Europe and North America—it used to be that about 10% of society used to control about 90% of the wealth, of the money that was—well, maybe not 90%; about 80% of the wealth, let's say, at the turn of the last century, in the 1890s into the 1900s.

What happened was that workers decided that enough is enough, that it was wrong that 10% of our society controlled essentially 80% to 90% of the wealth. So people decided the way to end that was to be able to negotiate collective agreements as workers by banding together into unions to negotiate fair wages and fair conditions of work, so that we're able to essentially make sure that the rest of society, the 90%, are able to share in the wealth of the economy and thus create a strong, robust middle class.

Ontario, as North America—Ontario specifically, as the rest of Canada and North America, has done extremely well over the last years building a very strong

middle class. Why? Because we had good unionization. There was a large percentage of our employees who were part of collective agreements they were negotiating that created a very robust middle class and, as a result, built a stronger economy. Mr. Ford understood way back when that if the workers who work in the factory don't make enough money to buy your product, you're lost. You're not going to build a strong economy. That's what unionization is all about. And what this does is further erode that middle class by saying that those collective agreements that are in place when it comes to the construction sector can be done away with so that we can control for the race to the bottom with the non-unionized sector, so that workers work for less money.

Why would we want to do that, first of all, as citizens of this province, and why would we want to do that as anybody who understands anything about economics? You have to make sure that you have the means to be able to distribute the wealth. We live in a democratic society, so we're not going to allow the state to do that by way of what we saw in the Soviet Union and China. We understand that in a democratic society you do that through collective bargaining. That is one of the democratic rights that individuals have in a society that's democratic like ours—the freedom to join a union so that you can sit down with your boss and you can negotiate your wage when it comes to the ability to be able to make a living.

What this bill essentially does is it makes it possible to de-unionize a sector of our economy, the construction trade, which is something that I can't support.

Interjection: Not at all.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I hear the Liberals and I hear the Conservatives say, "Not at all." What I see the facts are—our province and this country are having a smaller and smaller middle class and we're having more of the top 10% or 20% of society make more and more of the money and pay less and less of the taxes. I don't think that's progressive and I don't think it's right. As a New Democrat, I will stand proudly and vote against this bill. If there are issues—

Interjections.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Well, here go the Tories, talking about the union bosses. What about the corporate bosses? What about the people at the top, who are getting bonuses that are 250 times the amount of money that the worker makes on the factory floor? Is that right?

Those big bosses and the corporations—I think they're deserving of making a fair dollar. I think somebody who runs a big business should be paid a good wage, especially if they're the owner. They should be able to benefit from the profits of their endeavours as far as building capital and making money, but I think it's blatantly wrong when we're saying we're going to encourage the top 10% to make more and the rest of the 90% to make less. I think that's wrong.

What this is essentially doing is undoing what is the sectoral—not the sectoral bargaining, but I forget what it was called—the closed-shop arrangement when it comes

to the construction trades, and I don't think that's something that we should be supporting. Clearly, this is a step in the wrong direction. I will vote against this, and I encourage others in this House to do so, because all this is in the end is an attack on the middle class, an attack on the union sector, and saying to the people of this society that we should race to the bottom, we should give the top 10% more money and the 90% should settle for less. I'm not going to stand for that as a New Democrat.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Hon. David Zimmer: I'm pleased to rise in support of Bill 74, brought by the member for Lambton—Kent—Middlesex. Let me just go into some of the facts as to why I'm supporting this bill. Here's what happened: Back in 1958, down in the Sarnia area, there was a collective agreement entered into by EllisDon and one of the unions down there. That agreement provided for collective bargaining rights—we'll refer to it—in the Sarnia area.

That agreement was lived up to for a couple of years, and eventually everybody forgot about the agreement. As I understand it, it was in the desk at one of the unions, and over the almost 60—54—years, that agreement was forgotten about and was not adhered to in the rest of the province.

Then, in 1979, there was some labour reform legislation that set up a different regime that covered the collective agreements, construction companies and the like. As I understand it, a couple of years ago—maybe two or three years ago; two years ago—this agreement from 1958 was discovered in the back of a desk drawer at the union.

The effect of the changes that were made in 1979, when applied to the 1958 agreement, said, in effect, that the rights and obligations that the parties had entered into—and all the parties agreed that it was just going to be related to the Sarnia area—now, because of a legal loophole and some wording in the 1979 legislation, said that all of those rights that the union enjoyed vis-à-vis EllisDon applied throughout the entire province.

That was never the intention of the union at the time. That was never the intention of EllisDon at the time. So, in fact, the parties went before the Labour Relations Board to try and get this anomaly, this unintended consequence, sorted out, because people had forgotten about the 1958 agreement, and in the meantime the intervening 1979 legislation kicked in, which sort of mixed everything up.

What the labour board said when they heard the agreement—they felt they had no choice but to hold that the bargaining rights that were supposed to just relate to Sarnia now had to apply to EllisDon for the whole province. But the Ontario Labour Relations Board gave EllisDon two years from the date of the decision to seek a legislative solution to this legal loophole. The deadline is February 13, 2014.

That's why the legislation has been brought forward: to address this loophole. In fact, the 1958 agreement

between the parties, when considered in the context of the most recent labour legislation, which is the governing principle for these things in Ontario—you can think of that 1958 agreement as—shall I use the expression?—a rogue agreement. The point is, that agreement had unintended consequences for all the parties.

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What Bill 74 does—the member on the Liberal side from the riding of Vaughan who spoke just before has addressed these points. What the legislation does is remove this anomaly and say that an agreement that the parties entered into some 54 years ago, with the understanding that it would just apply to the construction work EllisDon was doing in the Sarnia area—there was never any intention that it would apply to everything all over Ontario. This has created unintended consequences for a whole host of parties. It has put EllisDon in a difficult economic situation, because they now have to work with a collective agreement that applies throughout the entire province.

There are some unions that are quite happy to see this anomaly cleared up, because EllisDon will continue to be able to do work throughout Ontario, and there will be jobs in eastern Ontario and jobs in western Ontario and jobs in northern Ontario and so on. But we have to get this anomaly cleaned up so that all the parties—EllisDon, employers, workers, everybody—are on a level playing field. It's this odd 54-year-old agreement that has caused this problem. This merely cleans that up.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Mr. Rob Leone: I'm pleased to rise to speak on Bill 74, An Act to amend the Labour Relations Act, 1995.

When I came to Queen's Park as MPP for Cambridge, one of the things that I hoped I would be able to do was come to this Legislature, come to this chamber, listen to the debate and be persuaded one way or another on legislation.

I have to say that when I first saw this bill, I looked at it, I read it and I thought it was a little odd, to be quite frank. I wasn't really sure what it sought to do. The members who have spoken on this bill, to this point in time, have certainly contributed and, I think, enlightened this debate quite significantly.

I appreciate the member for Essex, who spoke from a principled perspective, I think, as a person who comes from a construction union and was a member of a construction union; I think the member from Vaughan is of the same background. Having them contribute their thoughts about the contents of this bill and what this bill seeks to do—somewhat hesitating at some points in time, but certainly I think what we all share and what we all have in common is that we want to see Ontario companies employing Ontario workers and having them succeed to the best of their ability.

I think that's ultimately what this bill seeks to do. It's about fairness. It's about making sure that an Ontario company is on a level playing field with other Ontario companies and, at the end of the day, can compete with

other construction firms that come to Ontario to build the kinds of infrastructure projects in the ICI sector that, obviously, they would like to compete on.

Mr. Speaker, I say this because I believe, at the end of the day, this is about elevating an Ontario company and making sure it survives. It's about ensuring that this company, EllisDon, has the fairness and equal treatment that other companies are provided with. At the end of the day, we cannot ignore that this company heavily employs unionized workers, and I would imagine they would continue to do so in the near future.

I have to say that because this ultimately, as the member for Elgin–Middlesex–London stated, is about the construction trades, something we feel very passionately about on this side of the House—I think a lot of members certainly care about the construction industry. These are good jobs. These are jobs that pay well, that obviously provide the kind of income that can sustain a family, and we have to do whatever we can to ensure that Ontario workers are encouraged to be trained in the trades, but ultimately, once they're done their training, that they are going to be employed right here in this province.

The last thing that we need, I think, is to have these capable individuals, these men and women who have a whole lifetime of work ahead of them, simply leave this province because the work is out west or in another country.

Interjection.

Mr. Rob Leone: The member from Timmins–James Bay advocates quite forcefully for unions. Let me just say this: EllisDon heavily employs unionized workers. I would say, as I said before, that I would expect them to do so in the future as well.

But as I started speaking on this issue, what I think is very valuable—and I think the member for Vaughan stated this very succinctly—is that this is about creating fairness. What we can do about this is, if people have certain issues and certain problems with the bill, we pass it at second reading and bring it to committee so that all these issues can be dealt with and everyone has the fullness and understanding of what is happening here.

At the end of the day, let me restate that certainly I appreciate that the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs actually succinctly put, in his short time speaking to this bill, the process and the reason for this legislation and why a legislative solution is required, one that was provided for, and the Ontario Labour Relations Board said that it was acceptable to seek a legislative solution to this issue.

We have a timeline that expires within a few months: February 13 of next year, as the minister stated. We obviously have a responsibility to ensure that we have Ontario companies and put them on the right footing, so I think that we should support this bill and send it to committee. If we have issues at committee we certainly can deal with them there, and hopefully we can provide fairness to an Ontario-based company that employs thousands of people in good-paying jobs right here in this province.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Mr. Jim Wilson: I'm pleased to rise today to speak very briefly to this legislation, the Fairness and Competitiveness in Ontario's Construction Industry Act. We all know that the journey to jobs and prosperity begins by setting great goals. Ontario can lead this country in job creation again, as it has so often in the past, and we should accept nothing less.

This goal requires a level playing field for all businesses. Established Ontario companies must be able to compete against their multinational competitors in every sector of our economy, but a recent unfair decision by the Ontario Labour Relations Board puts that future at risk.

If the provincial government doesn't pass this bill, a technical ruling made by the Labour Relations Board will put one of our major employers, a London, Ontario, success story, at an untenable competitive disadvantage throughout the province, and it's no minor disadvantage. It will be crippling for this Ontario-based company, rendering them uncompetitive and possibly forcing them to leave the province. This is unacceptable, and we need to update the system before this ancient labour law chases jobs out of this province.

The Fairness and Competitiveness in Ontario's Construction Industry Act does nothing more than restore a level playing field. As elected members of the Legislature we should all stand for that.

But we must act swiftly, as has been said. The Ontario Labour Relations Board set a deadline of February 2014 to comply with its ruling. This timeline gave the company just enough time to seek a legislative amendment, which was allowed for in the decision and which is what we're trying to do today. It's a simple solution to a specific problem and we would all hope that all of the parties will join with us in the PC Party in ending this discriminatory practice. Let's pass the bill, get it to second reading so everyone can get a better understanding of it, then get it back into the House and pass it.

Finally, in the minute that I have, I'm hoping someday, before I leave this Legislature—voluntarily, I hope—that we build a new hospital in Collingwood and expand the one in Alliston. EllisDon may very well win one of those construction project bids in the future. If this bill is not passed, my local tradespeople will not be able to work on their local hospital, because it has to be the people that were part of the 1950s agreement—those particular trades in that particular collective agreement that, through, I think, a technical error, has now been spread right across the province.

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I'm speaking up for the people of Alliston, Tottenham, Beeton and Collingwood. Those tradespeople, unionized and non-unionized, should be allowed—after all, they're the ones who are going to raise the money for their local infrastructure projects, like the hospitals and schools—to share in that work, should EllisDon win those contracts. I'm doing it for fairness, not just for this company, but for my residents.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member for Lambton–Kent–Middlesex has two minutes for a response.

Mr. Monte McNaughton: Thank you very much, Speaker. I'd like to thank other colleagues in this House: the member from Essex; in particular, the member from Vaughan, who spoke clearly on this, and it has been a pleasure working with him on this; the member from Elgin–Middlesex–London; the member from Timmins–James Bay; the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs, who clearly outlined the reasoning why it's important for this bill to be passed; and my colleagues from Cambridge and Simcoe–Grey. Thanks for participating in the debate today.

It's important that Bill 74 is passed and gets to committee. A single working agreement that was made all the way back in 1958 is now being dredged up, and as I said before, a recent unfair decision by the Ontario Labour Relations Board puts one Ontario company's future at risk and threatens the viability of this important business. The agreement from 1958 puts EllisDon at a significant disadvantage compared to out-of-province competitors who are neither bound nor obligated to follow through with these types of agreements. It is this unlevel and uneven playing field that my bill, Bill 74, seeks to address and to resolve.

Simply put, the Legislature needs to update the system before this ancient loophole chases jobs out of Ontario. As I said in my remarks, here we are with 600,000 men and women out of work today. We cannot afford to have more jobs lost in any community across this province.

Thank you, members, for the debate. I look forward to passing Bill 74 here today.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The time provided for private members' public business has expired.

MUNICIPAL AMENDMENT ACT (ELECTION OF CHAIR OF YORK REGION), 2013

LOI DE 2013 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LES MUNICIPALITÉS (ÉLECTION DU PRÉSIDENT DE LA RÉGION DE YORK)

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): We will deal first with ballot item number 31, standing in the name of Ms. Jaczek.

Ms. Jaczek has moved second reading of Bill 16, An Act to amend the Municipal Act, 2001 to provide that the head of council of The Regional Municipality of York must be elected.

Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Second reading agreed to.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member for Oak Ridges–Markham.

Ms. Helena Jaczek: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to have the bill sent to the Standing Committee on the Legislative Assembly.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member has requested that the bill be sent to the Standing Committee on the Legislative Assembly. Agreed? Agreed.

PROTECTING CHILD PERFORMERS ACT, 2013

LOI DE 2013 SUR LA PROTECTION DES ENFANTS ARTISTES

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Mr. Miller has moved second reading of Bill 71, An Act to protect child performers in the live entertainment industry and the recorded entertainment industry.

Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Second reading agreed to.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member for Hamilton East–Stoney Creek.

Mr. Paul Miller: Thank you, Speaker. General government.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member has requested that it be referred to general government. Agreed? Agreed.

FAIRNESS AND COMPETITIVENESS IN ONTARIO'S CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY ACT, 2013

LOI DE 2013 SUR L'ÉQUITÉ ET LA COMPÉTITIVITÉ DANS L'INDUSTRIE ONTARIENNE DE LA CONSTRUCTION

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Mr. McNaughton has moved second reading of Bill 74, An Act to amend the Labour Relations Act, 1995 to alter bargaining rights conferred by pre-1980 working agreements in the construction industry.

Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour of the motion, please say "aye."

All those opposed to the motion, please say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

Call in the members. This will be a five-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1635 to 1640.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Can all members take their seats, please.

Mr. McNaughton has moved second reading of Bill 74, An Act to amend the Labour Relations Act, 1995 to alter bargaining rights conferred by pre-1980 working agreements in the construction industry.

All those in favour, please rise and remain standing.

Ayes

Albanese, Laura	Duguid, Brad	McNaughton, Monte
Berardinetti, Lorenzo	Hudak, Tim	McNeely, Phil
Broten, Laurel C.	Jackson, Rod	Milligan, Rob E.
Chan, Michael	Jaczek, Helena	Millay, John

Chiarelli, Bob	Jeffrey, Linda
Chudleigh, Ted	Leal, Jeff
Damerla, Dipika	Leone, Rob
Del Duca, Steven	MacCharles, Tracy
Delaney, Bob	Mangat, Amrit
Dhillon, Vic	McDonell, Jim
Dickson, Joe	McKenna, Jane

Murray, Glen R.
Nicholls, Rick
O'Toole, John
Qaadri, Shafiq
Wilson, Jim
Wong, Soo
Zimmer, David

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): All those opposed, please rise and remain standing.

Nays

Armstrong, Teresa J.	Mantha, Michael
Bisson, Gilles	Marchese, Rosario
DiNovo, Cheri	Miller, Paul
Fife, Catherine	Natyshak, Taras
Forster, Cindy	Prué, Michael
Hillier, Randy	Schein, Jonah

Singh, Jagmeet
Tabuns, Peter
Taylor, Monique
Vanthof, John

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 33; the nays are 16.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): I declare the motion carried.

Second reading agreed to.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member for Lambton-Kent-Middlesex.

Mr. Monte McNaughton: I move that this bill be sent to the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member has requested that the bill be sent to finance and economic affairs. Agreed? Agreed.

Orders of the day? Government House leader.

Hon. John Milloy: I move adjournment of the House.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The government House leader has moved adjournment of the House. Do I have agreement?

All those in favour, please say “aye.”

All those opposed, please say “nay.”

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

This House stands adjourned until Monday, June 10, at 10:30 a.m.

The House adjourned at 1643.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO
ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Lieutenant Governor / Lieutenant-gouverneur: Hon. / L'hon. David C. Onley, O.Ont.

Speaker / Président: Hon. / L'hon. Dave Levac

Clerk / Greffière: Deborah Deller

Clerks-at-the-Table / Greffiers parlementaires: Todd Decker, Tonia Grannum, Trevor Day, Anne Stokes

Sergeant-at-Arms / Sergent d'armes: Dennis Clark

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Albanese, Laura (LIB)	York South-Weston / York-Sud-Weston	
Armstrong, Teresa J. (NDP)	London-Fanshawe	
Arnott, Ted (PC)	Wellington-Halton Hills	First Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Premier vice-président du comité plénier de l'Assemblée
Bailey, Robert (PC)	Sarnia-Lambton	
Balkissoon, Bas (LIB)	Scarborough-Rouge River	Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Président du comité plénier de l'Assemblée Deputy Speaker / Vice-président
Barrett, Toby (PC)	Haldimand-Norfolk	
Bartolucci, Rick (LIB)	Sudbury	
Berardinetti, Lorenzo (LIB)	Scarborough Southwest / Scarborough-Sud-Ouest	
Best, Margaret R. (LIB)	Scarborough-Guildwood	
Bisson, Giles (NDP)	Timmins-James Bay / Timmins-Baie James	House Leader, Recognized Party / Leader parlementaire de parti reconnu
Bradley, Hon. / L'hon. James J. (LIB)	St. Catharines	Minister of the Environment / Ministre de l'Environnement Deputy Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint du gouvernement
Broten, Hon. / L'hon. Laurel C. (LIB)	Etobicoke-Lakeshore	Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs / Ministre des Affaires intergouvernementales Minister Responsible for Women's Issues / Ministre déléguéée à la Condition féminine
Campbell, Sarah (NDP)	Kenora-Rainy River	
Cansfield, Donna H. (LIB)	Etobicoke Centre / Etobicoke-Centre	
Chan, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (LIB)	Markham-Unionville	Minister of Tourism, Culture and Sport / Ministre du Tourisme, de la Culture et du Sport Minister Responsible for the 2015 Pan and Parapan American Games / Ministre responsable des Jeux panaméricains et parapanaméricains de 2015
Chiarelli, Hon. / L'hon. Bob (LIB)	Ottawa West-Nepean / Ottawa-Ouest-Nepean	Minister of Energy / Ministre de l'Énergie
Chudleigh, Ted (PC)	Halton	
Clark, Steve (PC)	Leeds-Grenville	Deputy Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint de l'opposition officielle
Colle, Mike (LIB)	Eglinton-Lawrence	
Coteau, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (LIB)	Don Valley East / Don Valley-Est	Minister of Citizenship and Immigration / Ministre des Affaires civiques et de l'Immigration
Crack, Grant (LIB)	Glengarry-Prescott-Russell	
Craitor, Kim (LIB)	Niagara Falls	
Damerla, Dipika (LIB)	Mississauga East-Cooksville / Mississauga-Est-Cooksville	
Del Duca, Steven (LIB)	Vaughan	
Delaney, Bob (LIB)	Mississauga-Streetsville	
Dhillon, Vic (LIB)	Brampton West / Brampton-Ouest	
Dickson, Joe (LIB)	Ajax-Pickering	
DiNovo, Cheri (NDP)	Parkdale-High Park	
Duguid, Hon. / L'hon. Brad (LIB)	Scarborough Centre / Scarborough-Centre	Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities / Ministre de la Formation et des Collèges et Universités
Dunlop, Garfield (PC)	Simcoe North / Simcoe-Nord	
Elliott, Christine (PC)	Whitby-Oshawa	Deputy Leader, Official Opposition / Chef adjointe de l'opposition officielle
Fedeli, Victor (PC)	Nipissing	
Fife, Catherine (NDP)	Kitchener-Waterloo	

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
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Forster, Cindy (NDP)	Welland	Deputy House Leader, Recognized Party / Leader parlementaire adjointe de parti reconnu
Gélinas, France (NDP)	Nickel Belt	
Gerretsen, Hon. / L'hon. John (LIB)	Kingston and the Islands / Kingston et les îles	Attorney General / Procureur général
Gravelle, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (LIB)	Thunder Bay—Superior North / Thunder Bay—Superior-Nord	Minister of Northern Development and Mines / Ministre du Développement du Nord et des Mines
Hardeman, Ernie (PC)	Oxford	
Harris, Michael (PC)	Kitchener—Conestoga	
Hillier, Randy (PC)	Lanark—Frontenac—Lennox and Addington	
Horwath, Andrea (NDP)	Hamilton Centre / Hamilton-Centre	Leader, Recognized Party / Chef de parti reconnu Leader, New Democratic Party of Ontario / Chef du Nouveau parti démocratique de l'Ontario
Hoskins, Hon. / L'hon. Eric (LIB)	St. Paul's	Minister of Economic Development, Trade and Employment / Ministre du Développement économique, du Commerce et de l'Emploi Leader, Official Opposition / Chef de l'opposition officielle Leader, Progressive Conservative Party of Ontario / Chef du Parti progressiste-conservateur de l'Ontario
Hudak, Tim (PC)	Niagara West—Glanbrook / Niagara-Ouest—Glanbrook	
Jackson, Rod (PC)	Barrie	
Jaczek, Helena (LIB)	Oak Ridges—Markham	
Jeffrey, Hon. / L'hon. Linda (LIB)	Brampton—Springdale	Chair of Cabinet / Présidente du Conseil des ministres Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing / Ministre des Affaires municipales et du Logement
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Klees, Frank (PC)	Newmarket—Aurora	
Kwinter, Monte (LIB)	York Centre / York-Centre	
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Leone, Rob (PC)	Cambridge	
Levac, Hon. / L'hon. Dave (LIB)	Brant	Speaker / Président de l'Assemblée législative
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MacLeod, Lisa (PC)	Nepean—Carleton	
Mangat, Amrit (LIB)	Mississauga—Brampton South / Mississauga—Brampton-Sud	
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Meilleur, Hon. / L'hon. Madeleine (LIB)	Ottawa—Vanier	
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Miller, Paul (NDP)	Hamilton East—Stoney Creek / Hamilton-Est—Stoney Creek	Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services / Ministre de la Sécurité communautaire et des Services correctionnels Minister Responsible for Francophone Affairs / Ministre délégué aux Affaires francophones
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Yurek, Jeff (PC)	Elgin-Middlesex-London	
Zimmer, Hon. / L'hon. David (LIB)	Willowdale	Minister of Aboriginal Affairs / Ministre des Affaires autochtones
Vacant	London West / London-Ouest	
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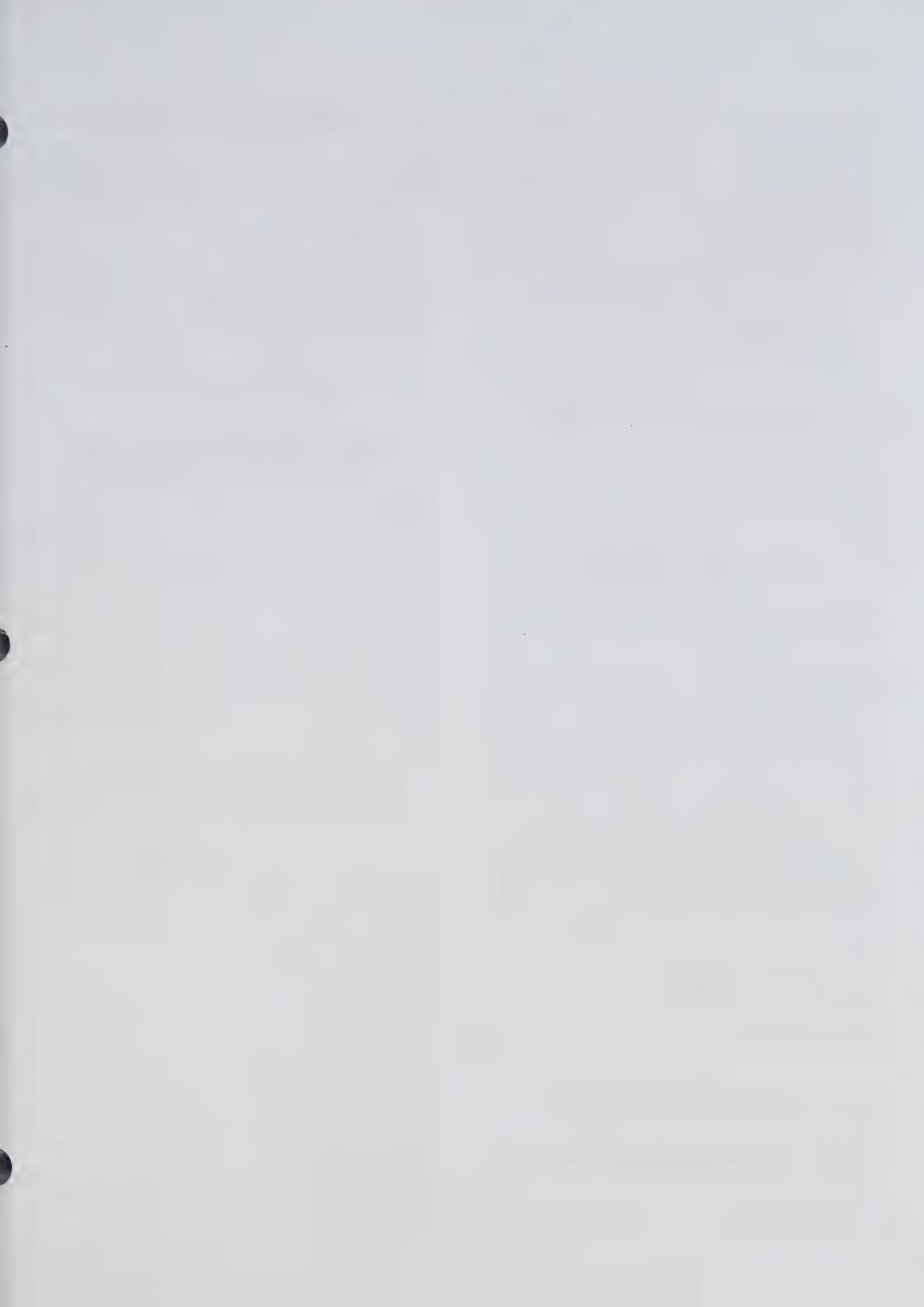
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Ted Chudleigh, Cheri DiNovo
Ernie Hardeman, Helena Jaczek
Amrit Mangat, Michael Mantha
Jane McKenna
Committee Clerk / Greffier: William Short





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Legislative Assembly of Ontario

Second Session, 40th Parliament

Official Report of Debates (Hansard)

Monday 10 June 2013

Assemblée législative de l'Ontario

Deuxième session, 40^e législature

Journal des débats (Hansard)

Lundi 10 juin 2013



Speaker
Honourable Dave Levac

Clerk
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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Monday 10 June 2013

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Lundi 10 juin 2013

The House met at 1030.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Good morning. Please join me in prayer.

Prayers.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: I want to recognize Tom Hawkins, who came from North Bay today for my unanimous consent motion to have second and third reading of the Hawkins Gignac Act. The bill is named after his brother's family, who perished from carbon monoxide, and I hope that today he will see the Legislature do the right thing and move it forward.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: I am very happy to welcome my family, who are visiting Queen's Park: my parents, Anwar and Qaisar Naqvi; my sister, Elia Naqvi; and most importantly, visiting for the first time, my nephew and niece, Darius and Larisa Faizani. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Mr. Lorenzo Berardinetti: I want to introduce my legislative assistant, who is just starting today. His name is Adrian Macaulay. I want to welcome him to be able to observe question period today.

Hon. Eric Hoskins: I'd like to introduce, from my constituency office, John McHughan, my constituency assistant; he's in the members' gallery. With him is Emily Philip-Tsujiiuchi, my intern student and a former legislative page, who is doing a fabulous job in my constituency office. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Mr. Steven Del Duca: It's my pleasure to recognize my executive assistant, Taleen Balian, who is here with us in the members' gallery. Taleen has been working with me over the last nine months since, I first arrived here. I wanted to thank her for all of her outstanding work; I sincerely appreciate it. I'm delighted that she finally escaped from my office to come over here and watch question period live.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Northumberland–Quinte West.

Mr. Rob E. Milligan: Mr. Speaker, I thought you would—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I start fresh every day.

Mr. Rob E. Milligan: It's a great pleasure to introduce to the chamber today my sister-in-law, Ms. Jodi Milligan. Thank you very much for coming, Jodi.

Mr. Michael Mantha: Our office has always functioned well when we have a good balance with volun-

teers, and I want to introduce Arashyot Kang, who has been volunteering at my office. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Hon. Linda Jeffrey: I'd like to introduce Kevin and Kiera Maloney, who are visiting here today from the city of Brampton. He was a successful bidder on the Rotary "Day with the MPP." Welcome to Queen's Park.

Mr. Jonah Schein: I'd like to welcome Max Gross to the chamber. He's a member of our riding association, one of our best canvassers and hardest-working volunteers. Welcome, Max.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Further introductions?

On behalf of the Minister of Finance for page Melanie Forbes: her father, Scott Forbes, and sister Kayla Forbes are here, along with Melanie's class from Tecumseh Public School, who will be visiting in the gallery this morning. Welcome to our guests.

It is now time for question period. The member from Oxford.

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: Mr. Speaker, I rise to seek unanimous consent. Given that life-saving Bill 77 has been introduced five times, has passed second reading three times and has been through committee, I seek unanimous consent that An Act to amend the Fire Protection and Prevention Act, 1997 to provide safety requirements related to the presence of unsafe levels of carbon monoxide on premises now be ordered for second and third reading and the question be put immediately without further debate.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I'm going to assume that that was not for question period, and it was a point of order seeking unanimous consent, so I won't stand down any questions.

The member from Oxford is seeking unanimous consent for second and third reading of his bill. Do we have an agreement? Agreed? I heard a no. Thank you.

Given my earlier comment, I would ask the clock to be reset, please.

ORAL QUESTIONS

ACCESS TO INFORMATION

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Mr. Hawkins, I'm so terribly sorry that you had to witness that this morning.

Premier, on September 25, the day after the first documents were released, I spent 20 minutes showing this Legislature that pages were missing—nothing from the Premier, barely anything from the energy minister.

The leader of the NDP spoke next and added, “There’s no correspondence from the Premier’s office,” followed by, “There’s a surprising lack of correspondence from ... the energy minister.”

At one point that day, Premier, you stood up and interjected into your House leader’s comments, “And they have the documents.”

You were a sitting cabinet minister at the time. You told fellow legislators that we had all the documents. It’s right here in the Hansard, Speaker, the 25th of September.

Will you apologize to this Legislature for telling us one thing when you knew all along that it was false?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I believe the member opposite knows very well that I have gone before committee and I have answered all the questions that were asked of me. I have said from the moment that I came into this job that I was going to be working to provide all the information that had been asked for, because I was clear that there was information that had been asked for that had not been provided, and that has now happened. That’s why I asked the Auditor General to look at the Oakville situation. That’s why we worked to broaden the mandate of the committee so that all of the questions that were being asked could get answers and that all the documents would be turned over. That’s what we’ve been engaged in for the past number of months.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Victor Fedeli: For quite some time, Premier, you’ve been getting away with saying we had “all the documents,” and, in fact, you would not answer all the questions at the justice committee. It took the privacy commissioner to prove what we’ve been saying all along: “There was a culture of avoiding the creation of written documentation on the gas plants issue.”

So now you’re still carrying that on by using secret Gmail accounts to circumvent the laws of this Legislature. Premier, is there anything you won’t do to keep your gas plants scandal from the taxpayers?

Last week, I stood here and asked you to call in the OPP to investigate this theft. You would not do that, so we had to. We need you to come clean, Premier. Will you now direct your staff to fully co-operate with the OPP investigation, and will you demand that the stolen documents and USB drives be turned over to the police?

1040

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: As I have said, we will co-operate with whatever questions are asked of us; we have done that, Mr. Speaker. If the member opposite remembers, the requests last year were for energy documents only. That has been broadened, and all of the documents that have been asked for—130,000 documents we have turned over; 30,000 documents from my office—have been turned over.

The privacy commissioner has made recommendations; she has written a report. I have said that I agree with her conclusions and that changes need to be made. We are working with the privacy commissioner’s office as we speak.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary.

Mr. Rob Leone: The Premier has no problems taking her staff to the woodshed for spaghetti-strapped tops but can’t be bothered to ask them to return stolen property.

The privacy commissioner says deleted documents wiped clean from computers may still exist on USB drives. This is stolen property. Staffers and ministers of the crown continue to obfuscate in committee. They say, “I don’t know anything,” until you can prove otherwise. That’s completely unacceptable.

Premier, when will Ontarians finally get some honesty from your scandal-plagued government?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Mr. Speaker, let me just say that in every aspect of this job I am working to make sure we have the professionalism that is required and expected of us as government.

I will say to the member opposite that the privacy commissioner has written a report; she has made recommendations. I agree with her conclusions that there need to be changes. In fact, we have proactively taken steps to put in place a protocol that is different than was here before. We have put training in place. We made sure that staff understand that the retention of documents is important and which documents have to be retained. We will continue to work with the privacy commissioner to make the changes that she has recommended.

ACCESS TO INFORMATION

Mr. Rob Leone: The privacy commissioner has tabled a report in this Legislature called Deleting Accountability. This now is the label of the Liberal Party and speaks to the culture of the Liberal Party.

Mr. Speaker, this all started in the estimates committee back on May 16 of last year, when we asked for the production of documents. It has been a year—two Premiers equally complicit in this scandal. You’ve lost an energy minister, you’ve lost a Premier and you took forever to apologize. All the while, the leader of the third party gasses up your getaway car.

You weren’t willing to hand over documents a year ago when we asked. We all know how that turned out. Premier, will you now hand over those stolen documents on USB keys?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I’ll just go over what has happened. I came into this office. I said during the leadership, Mr. Speaker, that we were going to provide as much information as we were asked for and we were going to work to open up the process. That’s what I’ve done.

I asked the Auditor General, on my own accord, to look at the Oakville situation. We immediately called the House back. We expanded the scope of the committee. I appeared at the committee. We have turned over documents. We’ve put in place a different protocol around retention of documents. I am doing everything I can to make sure that every question that is asked gets an answer and that all the documents that are relevant that

have been asked for are turned over. We will continue to behave in that manner.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary. The member from Prince Edward–Hastings.

Mr. Todd Smith: To the Premier: On Friday, Ontarians were shown exactly how far this government has sunk. In spite of evidence that senior Liberals had broken the law, you refused to call in the OPP. So the Ontario PCs wrote to the OPP commissioner, Chris Lewis, to get to the bottom of the biggest scandal in Ontario's history.

In spite of your shallow pleas that you've been trying to be transparent, it's been clear all along that you're more interested in protecting the Liberal Party than the people of Ontario. Just because the Liberals' NDP farm team is willing to support that kind of behaviour doesn't mean that we in this party will.

Premier, you resisted bringing in the OPP, but now they're coming after you. How much more evidence of senior Liberals breaking the law has to come to light before you actually come clean with the people of Ontario?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Just let me say that I have done everything in my power, since I have been in this office, to make sure that all of the information was available.

I have said, Mr. Speaker, that the original decision to site the gas plants where they were sited did not have a good process up front. There should have been a better process in the initial stages, so that a different decision could have been made. I have said that repeatedly, and we are working to make sure that this doesn't happen again.

On the issue of the documents, again I agree with the conclusions of the privacy commissioner, that this should not have happened, that emails should not have been deleted. We will work with the privacy commissioner to ensure that a better protocol is in place going forward and that the changes that need to be made are made.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary.

Mr. Todd Smith: We're not interested in hearing about the emails and documents that were turned over. We're more interested in hearing about the questions you refused to answer in committee. You didn't answer 32 questions that were put to you by my colleagues. Perhaps you're covering something up. Thirty-two times you didn't have an answer—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Order. The member will withdraw.

Mr. Todd Smith: Withdraw, Speaker.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Carry on.

Mr. Todd Smith: The former Premier likewise refused to actually answer questions in the Legislature, and on Friday, he insulted the intelligence of Ontarians by pretending that he had no idea what was happening in his office as this scandal unfolded.

Premier, senior Liberals have already broken the law, and your appearance at committee has set the example for what the Liberal standard of co-operation is. Is this

the kind of co-operation that the Ontario Provincial Police can expect, or will your government obstruct yet another investigation?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I answered under oath at the committee. I answered every question that was asked of me, and I gave the information that I had. I cannot help it if the member opposite didn't like the answers, didn't understand the answers or was looking for a different answer. I gave the answers that were true. I gave the answers with the information that I had.

I will continue to do that whenever I am asked. We will co-operate as questions are asked. We will provide the information that is requested.

ACCESS TO INFORMATION

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is for the Premier. Does the Premier believe that ministers of the crown are responsible for the actions of their staff?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Yes, I absolutely do.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Craig MacLennan, the chief of staff to two Ministers of Energy, told Ontarians that he routinely erased emails, destroyed all his emails. One of those former energy ministers, the member for Scarborough Centre, still sits in cabinet. Has the Premier asked this minister why his staff were destroying information that belonged to the public?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I think what the privacy commissioner's report has underlined is that there were protocols and practices in place that need to be changed, that should not have been in place. I have acknowledged that. I have said that I agree with the privacy commissioner, that those protocols were not the right ones. In fact, since we've been in office, there has been a different protocol in place. We will continue to work with the privacy commissioner to ensure that the changes that need to be made are made.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: The question was whether or not the Premier had asked her minister about whether he approved staff destroying records. The former Premier, the member for Ottawa South, sits on the government front bench as well. He's a member of the Liberal caucus that this Premier leads. In fact, she proudly sat in his cabinet. Has the Premier discussed the destruction of records with the member for Ottawa South, and if not, why not?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I have made it very clear to all of the members of my caucus and cabinet what the rules are, how we're going to proceed, what the protocols are. The Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities appeared before committee, answered the questions that he was asked vis-à-vis his time as Minister of Energy. He's been there and answered those questions. He and all the members of my caucus and cabinet know what the rules are, and we will be following those protocols.

Again I say, I agree with the conclusions of the privacy commissioner, that the retention of information is very important and that there are changes that need to be made. We are working with her office, Mr. Speaker.

ACCESS TO INFORMATION

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My next question is to the Premier. As the Premier knows, a sitting member can actually decline to testify before a committee. New Democrats are asking that the member for Ottawa South come to the justice committee to testify about why his staff were destroying information that belongs to Ontarians. Will the Premier ensure that this member of her Liberal caucus comes and testifies at committee?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I know there are a number of people who've been asked to come before or come again before the committee.

I can't speak to the scheduling issues that any of those people would have, but I certainly encourage anyone who is asked to come and speak to the committee, that they do that.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): A couple of conversations going on between parties—please stop.

1050

Ms. Andrea Horwath: The member for Ottawa South seems to be blaming his staff for the destruction of information that belongs to the public. I think Ontarians want to know why the member himself isn't taking any responsibility. Does the Premier think it's acceptable for this member of her caucus to try to avoid responsibility and blame everything on staff?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Well, I would suggest that none of the members who have been called are avoiding anything. The member for Ottawa South has appeared before the committee, and as I say, there are a number of people who have been asked to come or come again to the committee. I don't know what their scheduling issues are, but I certainly encourage them to do so, to come forward.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Ever since the Liberals first made their cynical play to cancel private power deals in Mississauga and Oakville, they've scrambled to cover the facts. But no matter how hard they try, the picture is becoming clearer and clearer by the day. We're seeing a lot of finger pointing and a lot of—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): That will do. Allow the question to be put.

Leader.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: We're seeing a lot of finger pointing and a lot of blame on that side of the House, but the buck stops with the Premier, the leader of the Liberal Party. Is she going to keep playing the blame game, Speaker, pointing fingers at staff who have departed? Or is she going to take the necessary steps needed to get the answers that people deserve?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: With all due respect, I believe I have taken responsibility. I believe I have said that those original decisions were not made in a context that was appropriate, that there should have been a better process.

I'll remind the leader of the third party that, once again, we all agreed in this House that those decisions to site those gas plants were not the right decisions and that they should be changed, and we all said that that should happen. We implemented the decision; we made that move.

But I have said repeatedly and I have said that it was unacceptable that we didn't have a better process up front. So I take responsibility. And further, in terms of providing the information, as I say, we have done everything possible since I've been in this office to provide the information that has been asked for. We will continue to do so.

ACCESS TO INFORMATION

Mr. John Yakabuski: My question for the Premier: Premier, so far you have shown a complete lack of leadership on your government's scandalous handling of the gas plant cancellations. For months, you've continued to insist that all of the documents have been released, even after our party revealed that there were huge gaps in that disclosure. We now know that at least five senior Liberal staff had their correspondence illegally wiped clean. And how have you responded? "Well, okay, we got caught this time. We'll have to be more careful the next time." No one will be forced to resign. If you have your way, there will be no consequences whatsoever.

The PC Party was forced to call in the OPP after you refused. Will you at least instruct your staff to disclose exactly what went on in your office and to fully cooperate with the OPP investigation?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Government House leader.

Hon. John Milloy: Let me remind the honourable member about the leadership that the Premier has taken on this file. When she assumed the office as Premier, one of her first actions was to ask the Auditor General to look into the Oakville situation, and we expect his report later this summer. It was this Premier who offered, although rejected, a select committee to the opposition, and instead, when they decided to go on a witch hunt over a former member, it was this Premier that offered to widen the scope of the committee and in fact, again, although rejected by the opposition, to do a government-wide search for documents. In total, to date we have given the committee some 130,000 documents, including 30,000 documents from the Premier's office. The Premier herself—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Renfrew asked the question; I'm sure he wants to hear the answer. And, member from Prince Edward-Hastings, if you were in your seat, I would say be quiet. Now I'll say it anyway.

Wrap up, please.

Hon. John Milloy: The Premier herself has appeared in front of the committee and answered every single question. Other ministers have gone forward. Mr. Speaker, this Premier has shown incredible leadership on this file.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. John Yakabuski: Back to the Premier: Let's put this into context. A sitting President of the United States was forced to resign and senior staff went to prison when caught in a clear attempt to eliminate records and deny access to the truth—you'll remember Watergate. That's exactly the situation we have here: an attempt by the Liberal Party to deny the people of Ontario access to the truth, and at least \$600 million of their money is gone.

How does the Premier respond? She's implementing a summer dress code. While the Premier worries about violations of her dress code, the people of Ontario are more worried about violations of the Criminal Code in your office.

Will you finally come clean and instruct your staff to reveal exactly what went on in your office, when these two gas plants were cancelled, and fully co-operate with any OPP investigation?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Thank you.

Government House leader?

Hon. John Milloy: Mr. Speaker, I know that the official opposition is taking advice from Republican strategists, but I think maybe we should put this in a bit of context. We are talking about a decision to cancel gas plants that was supported by every party in this House.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Order. I also remind all members that you reference someone by their title or by their riding.

Hon. John Milloy: Mr. Speaker, we're talking about a decision that was aggressively supported by the party opposite, although they're not interested in answering any questions about that. The fact of the matter is, as I outlined, that when the Premier assumed her role, she was the one who asked the Auditor General to look at the Oakville situation. She is the one who has broadened the scope of the committee and provided it with witnesses—herself, other senior ministers—and 130,000 documents.

LONG-TERM CARE

M^{me} France Gélinas: Ma question est pour la ministre de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée. Today the Minister of Health announced a new deadline for resident quality inspections of long-term-care homes. I feel like I'm having a really bad case of déjà vu all over again, because the same minister made the same announcement in 2010.

Speaker, all of last week this minister denied that she had failed. Will the minister finally admit today that she has ignored her own legislation?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: To be clear, Speaker, we have met the legislated requirements to have an inspection in long-term-care homes every year, but we have not met the commitment we made to residents of long-term care to do a thorough resident quality inspection every year. Today, I renewed our commitment to that. I announced that we will be hiring about 100 more inspectors, which more than doubles the number of inspectors, because we think residents of long-term care deserve to have the confidence that they are receiving the highest-quality standard of care in our long-term-care homes.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

M^{me} France Gélinas: Last week, the minister argued with my leader that the inspections were being done. We're talking about a huge credibility deficit here, Mr. Speaker. Today, she gave herself a new deadline to do the resident quality inspections because she failed to meet the last deadline.

Can the minister give me, and every other Ontarian who wants our long-term-care homes to be safe, a reason why we should believe her at her word this time?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: In 2010, we passed legislation that significantly strengthens our long-term-care homes—the quality of care in those homes, including more rigorous inspection.

Speaker, I think it's fair to say that as we have implemented this new regime of inspection, we were not appropriately staffed. We needed more inspectors, and that's why I am so very pleased that today I announced we are making that investment. As I said earlier, we owe it to the residents of long-term care to ensure that they have those inspections that will lead to higher quality care.

LONG-TERM CARE

Mr. Grant Crack: My question is for the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. Many Ontarians have loved ones in long-term-care homes. Their safety and the quality of their care are of utmost importance to all Ontarians. The Ministry of Health plays an important role at ensuring long-term-care homes provide the quality of care our parents and grandparents deserve.

1100

Given the recent news, many in my riding are concerned that the ministry could be doing more inspections of long-term-care homes. What is the minister doing to address these concerns?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Thank you to the member from Glengarry–Prescott–Russell for this question and for his strong advocacy for seniors in his riding and across the province.

In 2010, we passed strong legislation setting very high quality standards. In fact I'm unaware of any jurisdiction that has higher standards than right here in Ontario. It includes a rigorous inspection regime, but there is more that we need to do. I acknowledge that.

I was very pleased this morning to renew that commitment to the residents of long-term-care homes and their

loved ones that we will do a proactive, unannounced Resident Quality Inspection annually. By the end of 2014, we will have completed a new baseline RQI for every home in this province and annually thereafter.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Grant Crack: Thank you, Minister. This is good news for all of us who have loved ones in long-term care. Comprehensive, unannounced inspections are important to ensure long-term-care homes are protecting their residents and providing a high standard of care. But I'm sure there's more to be done.

Could the minister speak about what else she's doing to ensure residents of long-term-care homes are getting the best possible care?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: We've come a long way to improve care and ensure safety for our loved ones in long-term-care homes. We've got more than 10,000 people working in long-term-care homes. Our 2010 legislation means that long-term-care homes must report critical incidents. Inspection reports are posted online. Residents First is a wonderful quality improvement initiative. It provides long-term-care home staff with the knowledge and skills they need to provide safer, more effective and more responsive care. Very innovative and successful work is being done through Behavioural Supports Ontario to help staff care for people with behavioural challenges, very often dementia. We're working to implement the recommendations of the long-term-care task force.

There is a change of culture in our long-term-care homes. It is very positive, and I'm glad today we were able to further strengthen oversight in our long-term-care homes.

ACCESS TO INFORMATION

Mr. Ted Arnott: My question is for the Premier. To quote Sir Walter Scott, "Oh what a tangled web we weave, when first we practise to deceive." Last week the government learned that they cannot deceive the privacy commissioner; soon they will find that they cannot deceive the Ontario Provincial Police.

The Premier would have us believe that she wants to restore transparency and provide access to all documents relating to the Oakville and Mississauga gas plants scandal. She has made that statement repeatedly, even though she knew full well that damning emails had been erased.

What is the Premier prepared to do to ensure that all current or former Liberal caucus and staffers fully comply with the OPP investigation?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Although all the world is a stage, it seems to me that this place is a place where we are not really engaged in theatre.

What I have said over and over again is that I have worked, since the day I got into this office, to make sure that every question that was asked and every document that was asked for received an answer and the document was provided.

We opened up the process. We made sure that the committee had the opportunity to ask a broad range of

questions. We have complied and provided that information to the committee since I came into this office. I said during the leadership that that was exactly what we were going to do. That's what we followed through on—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Renfrew, come to order.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: —and we will continue to behave in that manner.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock. The idea of asking somebody to come to order doesn't mean that you get to finish the sentence; it means you just stop.

I also want to make a comment on what I heard. There's a delicate balance between what one wants to say in this place and what we're not supposed to say in this place. I think if you start down the road of leaving the listener with the impression that something is happening that's unparliamentary in your language, that could be the case. So I'm going to caution all of us to try to avoid trying to say something you're not supposed to say and say it a way that you can say it. I'll leave it at that and let everybody just kind of digest that.

Supplementary, please.

Mr. Ted Arnott: Back to the Premier: As this House winds up its spring session, the pungent stench of scandal permeates this chamber. The Liberals and their NDP enablers will soon return to their ridings and they'll discover that the people of Ontario have rendered their verdict.

The Liberal members comprise the government of Ontario. They are all responsible. By propping them up, the NDP are now culpable as well. The Liberals have been found in contempt of this House. The privacy commissioner says they broke the law. The OPP have begun their investigation. It's time for this government to go.

Will they call our non-confidence motion for debate and a vote before this House adjourns for the summer?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Government House leader.

Hon. John Milloy: We have a committee of the Legislature which is looking into this matter. The Premier has outlined the steps that she has taken beyond that, including speaking with the Auditor General.

The report of the Information and Privacy Commissioner raised some troubling issues. The Premier has outlined the steps that we have taken to make sure that the rules as they exist are being properly adhered to by political staff, both in her office and across Queen's Park.

At the same time, as I indicated last week, I will soon be sitting down with the Information and Privacy Commissioner to work with her in my capacity as Minister of Government Services, to see what steps can be taken to strengthen the act going forward, so that the information that she relayed in her report never happens again.

We have been taking proactive steps. We will continue to take those steps, and we will also allow the committee of this Legislature—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. New question.

ACCESS TO INFORMATION

Mr. Peter Tabuns: To the Premier: The former Premier's chief of staff, principal secretary and energy adviser had their email accounts destroyed shortly after the Standing Committee on Justice Policy began asking for documents about the gas plants.

Who gave the order for this information to be destroyed?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Again, as I have said, we have changed the protocol in our office. There has been a training done. Again, the member is asking a question that needs to be asked of someone else. It's very clear that we have put in place a protocol that emphasizes the importance of retention of documents. As I said, a training has been put in place.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

As the House leader reinforced, he will be meeting with the privacy commissioner in his role as Minister of Government Services, so that we can make sure that whatever strengthening of the protocol needs to be in place is done.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Speaker, I believe the Premier has some responsibilities of her own to ask questions. It was one of your caucus members, the member for Ottawa South, who was in your seat when information was being deleted from government computers. The member for Ottawa South is a member of your caucus. Has the Premier asked him whether he gave the order to destroy information?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: As I've said previously, the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities appeared before committee to answer questions about his time as Minister of Energy.

According to the protocol in place at the time, the email accounts of former government employees were deleted by IT staff periodically after the employees left. That protocol applied to all public servants. The chief administrative officer in each ministry approved the destruction of former employee email accounts, with the understanding that staff members had appropriately dealt with the records.

But that protocol has changed. We have changed that protocol. Since February we've taken steps to make sure that political staff are aware of their responsibilities. There has been mandatory training put in place, as I've said. We have changed the protocols around the retention of information.

TEACHER TRAINING

Mr. Phil McNeely: Speaker, my question, through you, is to the Minister of Education. Over the past number of years, we have made tremendous gains in our education system. Our graduation rates have increased by 15 percentage points. Our test scores have grown by 16 percentage points. McKinsey and Company has rated our schools among the best in the English-speaking world.

As we continue to roll out full-day kindergarten, we are providing our youngest learners with the best possible

start, to help them succeed later in their education. But if we're going to continue to provide our students with the skills they need to succeed, we need to ensure that our teachers are well trained for the classroom of today.

1110

I understand that our government has made improvements to our teacher education program. Speaker, through you to the Minister of Education: Could the minister please inform this House what our government is doing to enhance our teacher education program in our post-secondary institutions?

Hon. Liz Sandals: Thank you to the member from Ottawa-Orléans for his continuing interest in education. Speaker, we know that for student achievement to improve we need to continue to provide our students with high-quality teachers. That's why we are improving the way we train our teachers for the classroom.

Our new enhanced teacher education program will increase learning time for prospective teachers from two semesters to four. It will also double the amount of practical teaching days from 40 to 80 days. Students in the program will gain experience in areas including special education, mental health and incorporating technology into the classroom.

We also know that we have an oversupply of teachers in our province. As a result, we will be reducing our admission rate to the program by 50% so our teachers will have a better chance of being employed once they graduate. By making sure our teachers—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Phil McNeely: Thank you, Minister, for informing the House about the work our government is doing to provide our teachers with the skills they need to teach in our classrooms. It is great to hear that Ontario is modernizing teacher education to provide our students with the best possible education.

Minister, I expect these changes could impact some post-secondary institutions' teacher education programs more than others. It could also impact resources that have been going to other programs within universities.

Can the minister inform the House about what the government is doing to ensure adequate funding for Ontario's post-secondary teacher education system?

Hon. Liz Sandals: The Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities.

Hon. Brad Duguid: Our post-secondary partners have done a tremendous job adjusting to the challenges they have faced in the past. I agree that we're calling on them again to be challenged and to adjust to some changes. I'm quite confident that they can do it. They'll need to move very quickly to adjust to this new curriculum to implement it by 2015. This will be challenging for them, but I'm confident that they'll do it.

They'll also need to adjust to the decision to lower the funding assignment for teacher-ed seats. This won't be easy, but I'm pleased to report that we'll be working closely with impacted universities, and we'll work with those severely impacted to help them through this period of adjustment.

Mr. Speaker, together we will continue to build on the work that this government has done to make Ontario a global leader in education. We'll be working with those stakeholders to ensure that that work continues.

LEGISLATIVE OFFICERS

Mrs. Julia Munro: A question to the Premier: The Auditor General and now the privacy commissioner have provided scathing condemnation of the behaviour of your government and the government that you are now responsible for. In each of the cases where those officers of the assembly have, in great detail, enumerated your wrongdoings, you have thanked them for their advice.

My question is simple: How many more scandals before you finally take decisive action on their advice? When will you show some leadership?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I do thank the officers of the Legislature for their reports. They work hard, and they perform a very vital and important function. That is why I have said thank you to them and I have said, in this most recent instance of the privacy commissioner, that I agree with her conclusions. There are changes that need to be made, Mr. Speaker.

If we accept that somehow, at some point, there will be a static and perfect state of all of the processes around the Legislature, then I think we're mistaken. The Legislature and the processes continue to evolve. That's why it's important to have the officers of the Legislature analyzing what's happening and giving us recommendations.

So I do thank them. I agree with the conclusions of the privacy commissioner. In every case, we had either begun to take action before the report has come out, as in the case of the privacy commissioner, or we're responding to recommendations in an active way.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mrs. Julia Munro: Well, the NDP has chosen to prop up the Wynne-Horwath government with the promise of a new financial officer, another voice responsible to the assembly. Are you going to thank him when he admonishes you, or are you going to provide real leadership and exercise some ministerial responsibility?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: It's interesting because underlying the member's question is some kind of assumption that if everything were perfect you wouldn't need to have these officers in place.

The point is that it's important to have objective eyes looking at the procedures, looking at the processes, looking at government and providing advice. That is the point.

So, of course, when the new Financial Accountability—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

Premier?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Of course, when the new officer is in place, we will work with him or her. We'll make sure that we provide the information, and that we provide whatever information is necessary so that that

officer can do the work that will then lead to productive recommendations. That is the point of having objective analysis of the actions of a government. I look forward to working with that person as we have worked with the other officers of the Legislature.

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

Mr. Taras Natyshak: My question is to the Premier. Windsor residents are concerned about a toxic powder called petroleum coke that's been piled three storeys high, occupying an entire city block just across the river from Windsor. Pet coke has been called "dirtier than the dirtiest fuel." Residents, tourists, and commercial and sport fishermen on both sides of the river are concerned about clouds of black dust blowing off the mounds that are left uncovered.

The Premier has known that Windsor residents and officials have been concerned about these open piles for some time, so why didn't the Premier bring up pet coke at the recent meetings of Great Lakes governors?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of the Environment.

Hon. James J. Bradley: These matters are always raised with the appropriate authorities. The member would know that the government of Ontario has been very concerned about this and is taking all the action that would be appropriate. We are concerned when particularly items of this kind arise when the Americans are involved with it.

These matters are raised from time to time from the ministry staff to ministry staff. In our case it would be the Ministry of the Environment, and Environment Canada, in fact, would be involved as well. In the state of Michigan, I believe it would be called the Department of Natural Resources for the state of Michigan that would be involved in this.

So these matters have been raised. I thank the member for raising it in the House because it gives it even more of a profile now, and I think the need for the appropriate action to be taken by those who are responsible is quite evident to all who are concerned.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Taras Natyshak: I appreciate the minister's concern, but the government's silence on this has been deafening.

Windsor residents know that wind and rain don't know borders. They are concerned about what's going to happen to the river Windsor shares with Detroit, when rainwater and mountains of pet coke, which is high in sulphur and high in heavy metals, run off into the river.

Windsor council, the local MP and Michigan state and federal elected officials have all raised concerns about the potential health and environmental danger of pet coke piles, but the Ontario government has been silent.

If the Premier has known that residents and local leaders have been concerned about the pet coke, then why hasn't she taken any action to help resolve this problem?

Hon. James J. Bradley: I think the information that the member has provided is not accurate. It's not his

fault; he wouldn't be aware of the fact that officials of the Ministry of the Environment have contacted their counterparts in Environment Canada, as this is an international situation that has arisen. Environment Canada and the International Joint Commission are the lead on this issue. As a ministry, we have offered to provide any assistance required to see this issue resolved. So in fact, we are working with Environment Canada on this issue, it being international. The International Joint Commission is involved in this issue at the present time, and our ministry has raised this issue. The member perhaps gave the impression this has not happened, but our ministry has, in fact, raised this issue with all the appropriate authorities.

We hope to see it resolved as quickly and as expeditiously as possible because we find the situation that exists to be unsatisfactory.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Ms. Helena Jaczek: My question is for the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. Many people are increasingly choosing to rent out their basement suite as an apartment. Whether the suite becomes a home to an elderly parent, a spot for a live-in caregiver, or an apartment that will provide additional income to help the family with the mortgage, these spaces provide families with the flexibility they need.

However, if these secondary suites are poorly designed, it can be quite dangerous, especially if they lack fire alarms, proper exits or adequate fire barriers.

1120

Mr. Speaker, can the minister please tell us what our government has done about these issues and how they will help assist Ontarians in finding practical housing options while ensuring the safety of all Ontarians?

Hon. Linda Jeffrey: I'd like to thank the member for the question. Our government understands that the residents of Ontario need flexible and affordable housing options, particularly as our population grows up and ages. Secondary suites such as basement apartments and granny flats provide an affordable housing option and a solution to our increasing population, our changing demographics and our aging communities. These spaces allow Ontarians to have a place for their elderly parents or extended families to live with them while allowing for independence and privacy. It also gives elderly homeowners the ability to have their caregivers live with them, extending the time that they are able to stay in their homes.

These suites, whether they are newly built or have existed for years, must meet building and fire codes, providing safer housing options for Ontarians.

These are the solutions that Ontarians want and deserve, and that's why our government made changes to the Planning Act to help increase the supply of this flexible housing.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Ms. Helena Jaczek: Thank you, Minister. It's very heartening to hear what our government is doing to increase the number of affordable housing units in the

province. But all of these additional suites could provide additional problems. In some communities, residents have expressed concerns about the impact of secondary suites on their neighbourhoods. They are worried that the increases in population will lead to increased demand on services such as schools, hospitals, public transit and even roads. This need for additional housing options needs to be balanced with the capacity of the municipal infrastructure that exists.

Mr. Speaker, through you to the minister: Can you tell us what consultation occurred with municipalities before we implemented these changes?

Hon. Linda Jeffrey: Again, I would like to thank the member for the question. As a former city councillor myself, I remember how in the past the relationship between the municipal government and the province was fraught with tension and mistrust. That's why since 2003 I and this entire government have worked very hard to repair the relationship we have with municipalities. In fact, we signed an historic memorandum of understanding with the Association of Municipalities of Ontario in 2010 endorsing the principle of regular consultation.

On the issue of secondary suites, the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing met with the Association of Municipalities of Ontario and the city of Toronto to work together before changes were made, because we knew that these changes would have an impact on municipalities.

Our government remains committed to continuing to work with our municipal partners in making these changes to help communities across Ontario address local housing issues in a way that respects local opinions and desires.

ACCESS TO INFORMATION

Mr. Rod Jackson: Speaker, my question is to the Premier. "I didn't know" is literally becoming a cliché coined by the McGuinty-Wynne Liberals. The Liberals didn't know how much the gas plant cancellations would cost taxpayers. The Liberals didn't know about thousands and thousands of files received in document dump after document—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock. Order, please. Thank you.

Member from Barrie.

Mr. Rod Jackson: I guess I hit a nerve.

Apparently, the Liberals didn't know staffers were instructed to use Gmail accounts and delete email records free from public scrutiny.

There are only a few explanations for not knowing: ignorance, incompetence or moral bankruptcy. Premier, which one is it, or is it all of the above?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Government House leader.

Hon. John Milloy: It is this Premier who, upon assuming office, asked the Auditor General to look into the Oakville situation. It is this Premier who proposed a select committee of the Legislature to look into the gas plant situation, which was rejected by the opposition, but

she still went ahead and talked about modifying, enlarging, the role of the committee, which was agreed to by the committee. It was this Premier who appeared in front of the committee. It has been under this Premier's watch that 130,000 documents have come forward.

Yes, there is material in the Information and Privacy Commissioner's report which needs to be responded to. This Premier has given me direction, as Minister of Government Services, that we work with her to see that the current rules are strengthened, Mr. Speaker, so the actions that she outlined never happen again.

This Premier has shown leadership in this regard, in making sure there is transparency when it comes to the gas plant issue—which, I remind the member again, his colleagues were out campaigning for—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Rod Jackson: The ridiculousness of this doesn't even stop. It's easy to open up the process, it's easy to show leadership, after you've destroyed all the evidence that comes before it. Unfortunately, incompetence and malfeasance are not mutually exclusive. In fact, the Liberals have demonstrated the two are actually complementary to one other.

Last week marked the first time ever that an Ontario government has been investigated for two separate scandals by the OPP. Ontario's Information and Privacy Commissioner concluded record laws were in fact broken. The OPP's elite anti-rackets squad has launched a probe into the latest scandal within a scandal—the destruction of information on the public record, and it seems that just about everyone's ethics barometer is going off the scale, except for the McGuinty-Wynne-Horwath government.

Premier, the people of Ontario kind of got stuck with you, really. Will you let Ontarians decide if the Liberals are too incompetent or too corrupt to lead Ontario?

Hon. John Milloy: Speaker, there have been 130,000 pages of documents that have been put forward to the committee.

But let's go back to first principles. In the last election, there was not one party that promised to cancel that gas plant, there were three that promised to cancel that gas plant. It was the leader of that member's party who went on YouTube and said that if he was elected Premier, it would be "done, done, done." It was the leader of that member's party who went before committee and 28 times refused to talk about the costing and the research that had been undertaken by his party. It was the leader of his party who has been encouraging candidates to not appear in front of the committee to talk about their role in the gas plant cancellation.

I'm very proud of our Premier, who has been forthcoming, in terms of the actions she has taken and appearing in front of committee. It would be nice to see the same from that party across the way.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Mr. John Vanthof: My question is to the Minister of Health. SLAPP suits are on the rise in Ontario. These

lawsuits are commonly used to intimidate people from participating in public debate. They are an affront to democracy.

Last week, the Attorney General introduced legislation in this House that is intended to curb this problem. If passed, it would fast-track these types of lawsuits so they would be heard within 60 days and dismissed if they were shown to be SLAPP.

It's been much more than 60 days since the boards of the MICs Group of Health Services and the Anson General Hospital in Iroquois Falls have served nine members of the community with defamation lawsuits for standing up for what they believe.

Minister, do you support the anti-SLAPP legislation proposed by your government, and if so, why is your ministry still funding lawsuits against the people of Iroquois Falls?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I welcome the member's advocacy for the hospitals in his community, and he and I have spoken on several occasions. As he knows, we are moving forward. Mr. Ron Gagnon is in there, trying to do what he can do to get the health care that people deserve in that community.

We will continue to work on this. Of course, I fully support the legislation that was introduced by the Attorney General just last week.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. John Vanthof: Once again to the Minister of Health: The LHIN has initiated a review of the hospital situation in Iroquois Falls. Your ministry has also appointed a special investigator to look at the governance of Anson General Hospital, and still these people are being sued.

People in the community are very concerned about the future of their hospital and as a result, when the hospital board announced it was reopening memberships to the local corporation, interest was understandably very high. Imagine the community's surprise and outrage when over 200 people have had their membership applications refused, including long-term volunteers and past members.

Minister, can you tell me why Mrs. Gilda Shea, a pillar of the community and a recipient of the Queen's Diamond Jubilee Medal, is not welcome as a member of the Anson General Hospital?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: To the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services.

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: Mr. Speaker, I'm replacing the AG today.

One of the great things about living in a fair and democratic society is that we can speak out on matters that are important to us. If passed, this legislation would protect citizens by allowing courts to quickly identify and deal with strategic lawsuits, including a fast-track review process which requires that requests to dismiss must be heard by the court within 60 days.

1130

We have worked hard to develop a proposal that balances the protection of public participation and freedom

of expression with the protection of reputation and economic interests.

This legislation provides a made-in-Ontario solution based on the consensus recommendation of an expert advisory panel and extensive stakeholder consultation to provide a faster, more efficient civil process—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. New question.

SOCIAL ENTERPRISE

Mr. Bob Delaney: This question is for the Minister of Economic Development and Trade. Minister, social entrepreneurship is a sustainable way to build a diverse and vibrant economy with opportunities for people of all abilities and backgrounds. The 2013-14 Ontario budget includes a strong plan to help people across the province, including the promotion of new and innovative business initiatives. In my reading of it, one of the key initiatives is promoting entrepreneurship and innovation, providing Ontario the ability to transform ideas into goods and services to compete in the global economy. This is especially important for businesses owned by women and young people, and particularly by new graduates.

Would the minister update this House on what the province is doing to assist social entrepreneurship?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: I thank the member from Mississauga—Streetsville for this question. Ontarians are global leaders when it comes to social enterprise. There are roughly 10,000 social enterprises currently operating in this province. For those who might not know what social enterprises are, they are both for-profit and not-for-profit entities that focus on pressing social issues and have as their aim community well-being.

To continue our commitment of supporting social enterprise in this province, last month we announced \$600,000 in support of a new Catapult Microloan Fund, a partnership between the Centre for Social Innovation and a large group of private-sector stakeholders. This investment is going to help kick-start promising social enterprises with funding opportunities and mentorship services. This collaboration between government, businesses and not-for-profits is the first of its kind.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Bob Delaney: Young entrepreneurs, women and those new to Canada need those partnerships to be able to foster social enterprise in Ontario. Social entrepreneurs need access to the right funding opportunities. In fact, as we both know, there's no more fatal weakness for a new business than undercapitalization.

It's important that prosperous and fair societies can depend on a sustainable economy. Minister, please tell the House how pairing economic development and social impact will create economic and employment opportunities for young Ontarians.

Hon. Eric Hoskins: The Ontario government is focused on building both a prosperous economy and a fair society for all Ontarians. We believe that these two goals are not only complementary, but are interdependent.

Many social entrepreneurs and innovative thinkers know that you can't have one without the other.

Our younger generations are poised to make a difference in the world. That's why the bridge to economic development for so many of them is guided by social impact for many young Ontarians.

Our government's mandate reflects this kind of social responsibility. We've committed \$295 million for our youth jobs strategy. Mr. Speaker, I think I'd be remiss if I didn't mention that of the 50,600 jobs created last month in this province, I'm proud to say that more than 20,000 of those are jobs for youth under the age of 25 years, dropping the unemployment rate by 1.1% for those same youth.

DEVELOPMENTAL SERVICES

Mrs. Christine Elliott: My question is for the Premier. On May 16, my private member's resolution to establish a select committee to develop a comprehensive developmental services strategy was unanimously accepted in this Legislature, yet this committee has yet to be struck. There's every indication that both the Liberals and the third party are balking at this, despite the unanimous consent.

Premier, this is of huge importance to people across this province. They are counting on us to help them. Will you stand up today and agree, right here, right now, to establish this committee so that it can start its work immediately?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Premier?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Government House leader.

Hon. John Milloy: I certainly speak for members on this side of the House that we appreciated the motion that was brought forward and the member's commitment to issues around developmental services. I think the honourable member is aware that that motion, the follow-up to that motion, is a matter that is discussed between House leaders, and there is a process to examine those types of requests and move forward. I would advise her, obviously, to work with her House leader, but certainly myself and the other House leaders will be meeting hopefully later today and—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Renfrew will come to order; that's the last time I'm telling him.

Finish, please.

Hon. John Milloy: As I say, there is a process to examine these requests.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Mrs. Christine Elliott: With the greatest of respect to the House leader, that is complete and utter nonsense. This is not a partisan issue. This is not something that should be caught up with other House leaders' issues. This is vitally important to people, and you know and I know—everyone in this House knows—those people

desperately need our help. Do not do this. Please agree to strike this committee. We have spoken to the House leaders. This is nonsense. Do the right thing and establish this committee right now.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Thank you.

Government House leader.

Hon. John Milloy: As a former Minister of Community and Social Services, I can talk about our government's commitment to the developmental services sector—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Order.

Hon. John Milloy: —I can talk about the significant investments that have been made by this government and I can talk about our most recent budget—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Prince Edward—Hastings, come to order, now. The member from Halton Hills, come to order. The member from Thornhill, come to order.

Last time, the member from Prince Edward—Hastings, come to order or you are warned. The member from Prince Edward—Hastings is warned.

Carry on.

Hon. John Milloy: I can talk about our most recent budget and the investment of, I believe, 42 million additional dollars in the developmental services sector, a vote which is going to happen tomorrow afternoon. When it comes to special committees of this Legislature, there is a process for House leaders to take a look at those—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): New question.

MUNICIPAL PLANNING

Mr. Gilles Bisson: My question is to the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure. Minister, you will know, because I've talked to you on a number of occasions about this issue, the docks in Moosonee have been taken out of the river and they've been sold by the town of Moosonee. As a result of that, people have absolutely no way of being able to transfer from the water taxis on to the Moononee side of the river safely. I've talked to you about the possibility of the province taking over the responsibility to maintain those docks in an ongoing way, and I would like to know if I can have your assurance now because the municipal council is meeting tonight and they need to know from you if we're able to do this. If so, I think we can work this out.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: I want to thank the member opposite for his very hard work on this file. I'm in total agreement. We are trying to find money right now in the ministry; as you know, the budget is tight. This is not a huge amount of money but it's important. Any action by the town council to support this process to get the docks, which we have to retrieve, and to work with my ministry to do that would be most helpful, so I would strongly en-

courage them to support the initiative that you have been advocating.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Point of order from the Premier.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I'd just indulge the House—I'd like to introduce my mother, who is here, Pat Wynne, and my youngest sister, Marie Hodgson, and her friend Brenda Frey.

CORRECTION OF RECORD

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Toronto—Danforth, on a point of order.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: On a point of order: I need to correct the record. Earlier today, I asked a question of the Premier. I referred to the justice committee when I should have referred to estimates committee.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. The member is right with his point of order. All members have the right to correct their own record.

VISITOR

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Minister of Education, on a point of order.

Hon. Liz Sandals: On a point of order: This seems to be mother morning. The mother of my chief of staff is here today, and I would like to welcome Rosario Guaristi.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): There are no deferred votes. This House stands adjourned until 1 p.m.

The House recessed from 1140 to 1300.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

DR. LAURENCE HEWICK

Mrs. Jane McKenna: Over the past 13 years, Burlington's Golden Horseshoe Venture Forum has provided a unique forum for venture capital firms—176 so far—to present their companies to local investors and business service providers.

With innovation comes change. At a recent board meeting at the Golden Horseshoe Venture Forum, Dr. Laurence Hewick announced that he will be retiring as forum president at the end of this month. Dr. Hewick has served as Golden Horseshoe Venture Forum president for the past seven years and as a board member since the forum's founding in 2000.

Dr. Hewick is also president of Hewick Research, a new venture capital firm specializing in angel capital and strategic consulting. He has worked throughout Europe to establish centres of entrepreneurial excellence and is a

sought-after speaker on the topics of innovation and entrepreneurship.

In his work at the forum, Dr. Hewick has had a transformative impact on Burlington's business culture. His passion has helped forge dynamic relationships between ideas, people and investors and drawn in forward-looking sponsors like Deloitte, TD Bank Financial Group, RockLinc Investment Partners and Venture Accelerator Partners.

Congratulations to Dr. Hewick and all at the Golden Horseshoe Venture Forum, and best wishes for his bright business future in his next chapter.

RECREATIONAL VEHICLES

Mr. John Vanthof: The all-terrain vehicle has become an integral part of life in rural and northern Ontario. The ATV is not only a work tool but is also used by many for recreational purposes.

In 2003, the Ontario government enacted legislation that allowed ATVs to drive on the shoulders of secondary provincial highways. This legislation has been very beneficial for residents of rural Ontario. Over the years, ATVs have evolved and many people now use UTVs instead. The main difference is that a utility vehicle has a steering wheel instead of handlebars and a bench seat instead of a seat straddling the gas tank. Many riders prefer UTVs because two people can ride comfortably on one machine. There is a problem, however. The legislation that allows ATVs to drive along provincial highways does not apply to UTVs.

People leaving home to get to bush trails are technically breaking the law. In many cases, police are turning a blind eye, but if there is a problem, someone will be caught in a bad situation. The same holds true for recreational vehicle rallies. Many participants use UTVs, which are legal on trails, but if the trail follows the shoulder of a road, they are not. This is causing confusion and potential problems.

It is time that the legislation governing the use of ATVs evolves along with the vehicle. There is currently a UTV pilot project in Quebec. Many workable stopgap measures have been suggested, like one-day permits for rallies or municipal control over their use, but the ideal solution would be to amend the provincial legislation so that both ATVs and UTVs are covered. I would urge the provincial government to work with us to reach that goal.

SENIORS

Mr. Bob Delaney: Seniors are the fastest-growing demographic in our western Mississauga neighbourhoods of Lisgar, Meadowvale and Streetsville. For every senior alive today, when we, the baby-boom generation, are ourselves mostly seniors, there will be two seniors.

Modern medicine allows us to live longer and lead more active lives than our parents or grandparents could ever imagine. A key part of a fulfilling and happy retirement is the ability to live in comfort and dignity in one's own home as long as possible.

June is Seniors' Month in Ontario, a great time for seniors to celebrate their life, their achievements and their legacy. Our seniors have worked hard and continue to contribute to their families and to their communities.

In this spirit, Mississauga ward 9 councillor Pat Saito and I will host the 2013 Seniors' Info Fair. It will provide practical information on programs and services for seniors: health services, nutrition, at-home support for seniors, safety and much more.

The Seniors' Info Fair will take place this coming Friday, June 14, 2013, from 9 a.m. to 11 a.m. in the Village Room at the Meadowvale Community Centre, Glen Erin Drive, between Battleford Road and Aquitaine Avenue.

Come one, come all. We'll see you all at the seniors' fair this coming Friday.

ROTARY CLUB OF COBOURG

Mr. Rob E. Milligan: I'm honoured to rise in the House today and recognize a Rotary Club in my riding of Northumberland–Quinte West that we are all very proud of. The Rotary Club of Cobourg was established in 1921 and has more than tripled its membership since then. It has the impressive distinction of being one of the most active Rotary Clubs in the country.

The Rotary Club of Cobourg, from its very inception, became instrumental in improving the lives of citizens in my riding. Cobourg Rotary is an integral part of the community and is engaged in everything from assisting the poor and homeless to helping troubled youth.

Some of the notable recent achievements of the Cobourg Rotary Club include collecting \$20,000 to give as a gift to the Crippled Children's Treatment Centre in Peterborough and responding with a \$15,000 donation to Cobourg's Transition House's urgent need to replace existing beds and mattresses.

In addition to this, they have continued funding a variety of post-secondary education programs and sponsoring local air cadet programs. The club has also given extensive financial support to several recreational centres in my riding.

One of the other achievements I would like to bring to the House's attention is the major project that Rotary International has been involved in. This is the global eradication of polio, spearheaded by Cobourg's own Dr. Robert Scott, who was recently honoured by Rotary International on his 80th birthday.

Thank you very much, Dr. Scott, for everything you've done, and thank you very much to the Rotary of Cobourg.

NORTHWESTERN ONTARIO

Ms. Sarah Campbell: As you know, I'm honoured to represent the riding of Kenora–Rainy River. In the northwest, we have much to be proud of. Our pristine lakes, forests and green spaces are the envy of many. Each year, thousands of people travel to our region for

the opportunity to land the big fish or find the trophy buck that they'll talk about for the rest of their lives. Thousands more people take to our forests, streams, rivers and lakes to enjoy fresh-air activities such as camping, kayaking and hiking or to take in the northern lights.

The experiences are as diverse as our communities. Whether they're experiencing our rich culture at powwows across the northwest, celebrating the float planes that bring many to our region via Red Lake, enjoying the Bannock Bake-Off in Sioux Lookout—a personal favourite—taking part in the International Tug of War in Fort Frances, or taking in Harbourfest in Kenora, the Trout Forest Music Festival in Ear Falls, MooseFest in Dryden, Railroad Daze in Rainy River or White Otter Days in Ignace, or one of the dozens of other festivals throughout the region, northwestern Ontario has something for everyone, and our hospitality is second to none. It's why so many of my caucus colleagues constantly ask me, "When can we come up to your riding to do some great fishing?"

Speaker, we in the northwest are proud of what we have to offer, and I'd like to take this opportunity to formally invite everyone in this Legislature and across Ontario who might be watching this to come up to northwestern Ontario, experience it for themselves and see why those who come up once keep coming back.

3018 ROYAL CANADIAN ARMY CADET CORPS

Mr. Phil McNeely: On June 2, I attended the annual ceremonial review of the 3018 Orléans Royal Canadian Army Cadets. This year's review also marked the 25th anniversary of the 3018, which formed on September 8, 1987.

Awards and medals were presented as part of the celebration. Recipients were Corporal Connor Shand; Master Corporal Emileigh Binet; Sergeant Colvin Gallant; Warrant Officer Leandro Limaylla-Abad; Sergeant Matthew Gadde; Warrant Officer Ibrahim Al-Obedy; Master Corporal Jean-Luc Masse; Master Corporal Natasha Beaudoin; Marksman of the Year, Warrant Officer Samantha Bonacci; Sergeant Kyle Horne; and Warrant Officer Marc-Andre Binette. I'm proud to say that most of these cadets are students at Ottawa–Orléans high schools.

The corps has come a long way in the past few years, increasing its strength from 30 cadets in 2008 to 140 cadets today. In attendance at the cadet review were all four of the regional expeditions.

This summer, 80 cadets will participate in summer training at training locations in Ontario, Quebec, Alberta and Yukon, and one lucky cadet will be travelling to Wales.

1310

Much of the credit goes to the commanding officer, Major Tim McKee, and the training officer, Captain Cindy McKee, for building up this excellent cadet unit.

The skills that cadets learn—teamwork, leadership, taking responsibility for others, self-discipline—will help them throughout their lives, whatever they decide to do.

I was proud to participate in the recognition of this excellent group of local cadets, and I want to take this opportunity to congratulate the cadet corps on their astonishing success over the past 25 years.

FIESTA WEEK

Mr. Jerry J. Ouellette: On Sunday, June 16, Father's Day, the community of Oshawa will kick off its 39th annual cultural festival known as Fiesta Week, with a parade of floats and marching bands, followed by the fiesta concert and six days of international pavilion displays.

Fiesta Week is best described as a taste of Durham, a week-long multicultural celebration that gives the residents of the region an opportunity to experience European, Asian and Caribbean cultures and foods without ever leaving our hometown.

In fact, Oshawa's Fiesta Week has been voted one of Ontario's top 100 festivals and events.

Fiesta Week brings the people of Oshawa together to celebrate and appreciate our city's rich multicultural heritage. It provides over 100,000 people with an occasion to examine our community's diverse culinary, dancing and musical talents from a wide variety of ethnic backgrounds.

Various cultural communities in Oshawa operate pavilions highlighting their respective cultures across the city, including Lviv, Dnipro, the Greek community, General Sikorski, Roma, Carib and Loreley, just to name a few.

The Oshawa Folk Arts Council is a voluntary, non-profit community organization that oversees all aspects of the annual Fiesta Week festivities. I'd like to personally thank and congratulate all the dedicated volunteers with the Oshawa Folk Arts Council who work diligently throughout the year to make Fiesta Week the great success it is. I am confident that 2013 will be no exception.

I would also like to thank all of the wonderful members of the cultural organizations for the many hours they contribute towards Fiesta Week.

Finally, I wish to invite all members of this House and everyone in Ontario to visit Oshawa and participate in one of Ontario's premier summer festivals, Fiesta Week.

ALL-INCLUSIVE PARTICIPATION PARTICIPATION INCLUSIVE

Mr. Shafiq Qadri: Speaker, from the heart, as the member of provincial Parliament for Etobicoke North, one of Canada's most diverse ridings, I was disheartened, discouraged and dismayed to learn that a young Canadian boy in Quebec is being asked to choose between playing the sport he loves—soccer—and his religious observances.

Despite various attempts at setting back the clock, Canada is still the most diverse country in the world. This is increasing daily, and it's something we are and should be proud of.

Members of the Sikh community are very prominent in my riding and have been part of Canada's collective history since the early 1900s. More than 50% of Sikh Canadians call Ontario home. The community has actively contributed in all spheres of endeavour, serving in all spheres of public life, from police forces including the RCMP, our Armed Forces, and, of course, right here in this Legislature.

I stand with the parents in my community who want all children in Canada to have an equal opportunity for physical activity and sports. Sports not only keep our children healthy and active, but also build leadership and team-building. We break barriers when children build a sense of community with each other at a young age.

The aspiration for all-inclusive participation, irrespective of labels or descriptors, is something that I know, trust and expect all members of this Ontario Legislature to share in this, the so-called 21st century. Canada's diversity is a source of strength and pride for all Canadians. All faiths and traditions deserve to be respected and understood.

La diversité du Canada est une source de fierté pour tous les Canadiens. Toutes les croyances et traditions méritent d'être respectées et comprises.

Danayvad. Thank you. Merci beaucoup.

AMYOTROPHIC LATERAL SCLEROSIS

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: In February, at the age of 66, Alf Groves passed away after a three-year battle with ALS, or Lou Gehrig's disease. Formerly known as amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, ALS is a progressive neurodegenerative disease that affects nerve cells in the brain and spinal cord. Every year more than 5,600 people are diagnosed with it. Alf was the husband of my sister Janet. He left behind three children and all his grandchildren.

Gary Fizell was a good friend of mine who died in 2009 after a 10-year battle with ALS. He was very active in our community and was a long-time coach of the Monkton Wildcats. When Gary's health declined, the community came to his aid, raising money for a new home that could accommodate Gary. To this day, the community holds a fundraiser for ALS research in his honour.

ALS has also claimed the lives of Monkton dairy farmer Bill Mann and Pat MacKenzie, a retired high school teacher from Acton. He was the father-in-law of a good friend of mine.

And so this disease is very personal to me.

ALS was in the news again just this weekend when we learned that it claimed the life of former US ambassador to Canada Paul Cellucci.

June is ALS month. Across the country, groups and individuals are raising awareness of this terrible disease. ALS Canada is supporting their efforts. Here in Ontario, our communities are responding, bringing comfort and

support to those who need it. In our towns and cities, people are responding to the need. I know all members will join me in thanking them. Through their efforts, we will find a cure. We must find a cure.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I thank all members for their statements.

CORRECTION OF RECORD

Mr. Paul Miller: Point of order, Speaker: To correct my record, last Thursday I missed introducing Mia Van Wyck-Smart and Elizabeth Van Wyck, who were two of the supporters here for the successful second reading of Bill 71, the Protecting Child Performers Act.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member is correct on a point of order that all members have an opportunity to correct their own record. I appreciate that.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

TOWING INDUSTRY ACT, 2013

LOI DE 2013 SUR L'INDUSTRIE DU REMORQUAGE

Mr. Ouellette moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 93, An Act to regulate the motor vehicle towing industry in Ontario / Projet de loi 93, Loi réglementant l'industrie du remorquage de véhicules automobiles en Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member for a short statement.

Mr. Jerry J. Ouellette: The bill amends the Highway Traffic Act and enacts the Towing Industry Act, 2013.

An amendment to the Highway Traffic Act requires tow trucks driven on highways to have speed-limiting systems that are activated and functioning in accordance with the regulations made under the act.

The Towing Industry Act, 2013, provides for self-regulation within the towing industry in the public interest, which is managed by a board of directors made up of operators of towing businesses and tow truck drivers, who must register with the council in order to carry on a towing business or operate a tow truck. At least 40% of the directors are appointed from outside the industry to ensure the public interest is represented. The activities of the council are funded through fees established by the board.

A complaints/discipline procedure is provided, and registered persons are held accountable in the way they are providing towing services. Neither the crown nor municipalities may retain the services of a tow truck driver unless the driver furnishes proof of his or her registration with the council.

It is an offence for an operator of a towing business or a tow truck driver to accept a referral fee from a person who works on or repairs vehicles.

The board of the council is provided with regulation-making powers that are subject to the approval of the Ministry of Government Services.

**LABOUR RELATIONS
AMENDMENT ACT (BARGAINING
UNITS
AND CERTIFICATION
OF TRADE UNIONS), 2013**

**LOI DE 2013 MODIFIANT LA LOI
SUR LES RELATIONS DE TRAVAIL
(UNITÉS DE NÉGOCIATION
ET ACCRÉDITATION DES SYNDICATS)**

Mr. McDonell moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 94, An Act to amend the Labour Relations Act, 1995 with respect to the determination of bargaining units and the certification of trade unions / Projet de loi 94, Loi modifiant la Loi de 1995 sur les relations de travail en ce qui concerne la détermination des unités de négociation et l'accréditation des syndicats.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member for a short statement.

Mr. Jim McDonell: The bill amends the Labour Relations Act, 1995. A trade union is no longer required to include a written description of the proposed bargaining unit. The unit then consists of the whole payroll.

The Ontario Labour Relations Board is required to hold a hearing when determining the size of the bargaining unit and whether to direct a representative vote, and cannot certify a union unless a representative vote is held. If the board determines that the employer has interfered improperly with a trade union, it will trigger a representative vote. The time limit for a vote is extended to 10 days.

The bill transfers the burden of proof to the complainant in any Ontario Labour Relations Board hearing or proceeding and provides the right to appeal a decision to the board or Divisional Court.

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For construction bargaining units, the board is no longer permitted to refer to a geographic area and is not permitted to confine the unit to a particular work site or shift.

MOTIONS

APPOINTMENT OF AUDITOR GENERAL

Hon. John Milloy: Mr. Speaker, I seek unanimous consent to move a motion without notice concerning the appointment of the Auditor General.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Mr. Milloy is seeking unanimous consent to move a motion. Agreed? Agreed.

Government House leader.

Hon. John Milloy: I move that an humble address be presented to the Lieutenant Governor in Council as follows:

“To the Lieutenant Governor in Council:

“We, Her Majesty’s most dutiful and loyal subjects, the Legislative Assembly of the province of Ontario, now assembled, request the appointment of Bonnie Lysyk as Auditor General for the province of Ontario, as provided in section 3 of the Auditor General Act, RSO, 1990, c.A35 to hold office under the terms and conditions of the said act, effective September 3, 2013.”;

And that the address be engrossed and presented to the Lieutenant Governor in Council by the Speaker.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Mr. Milloy moves an humble address be presented to the Lieutenant Governor in Council as follows:

“To the Lieutenant Governor in Council:

“We, Her Majesty’s most dutiful and loyal subjects, the Legislative Assembly of the province of Ontario, now assembled, request the appointment of Bonnie Lysyk as Auditor General for the province of Ontario, as provided in section 3 of the Auditor General Act, RSO, 1990, c.A35 to hold office under the terms and conditions of the said act, effective September 3, 2013.”;

And that the address be engrossed and presented to the Lieutenant Governor in Council by the Speaker.

Do we agree? Agreed. Carried.

Motion agreed to.

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

PORTUGUESE HISTORY AND HERITAGE MONTH

Hon. Charles Sousa: As a Canadian of Portuguese descent, I am pleased to celebrate June as Portuguese History and Heritage Month here in Ontario.

June 10 is Portugal Day. It also commemorates O Dia de Camões and celebrates the diaspora of Portuguese communities around the world.

This day marks the anniversary of the great Portuguese poet Luis de Camões, who died June 10, 1580. Luis de Camões wrote about the many adventures of Portuguese explorers who navigated the globe and were among the first to reach North America. Since the 15th century, Portuguese ships travelled to Newfoundland and Labrador and fished off the Grand Banks.

This is also a special year that marks the diamond jubilee anniversary of official migration of Portuguese to Canada. Sixty years ago, a small group of Portuguese immigrants arrived, on May 13, 1953, at Pier 21 in Halifax to find contract work. They were put on rail cars

to the far reaches of the forests of BC and to the winter camps of Labrador. That initial arrival opened a wave of Portuguese workers and immigration into Canada. Hundreds of thousands of Portuguese sought opportunity, employment and a life free of political oppression.

Mr. Speaker, I'm proud to say that my father, Antonio Sousa, was one of those 69 men who arrived on that inaugural voyage, and he's here today in the members' gallery. My father is accompanied by my wife, Zenny, whose father came in 1956, also a pioneer in his own right during those years.

I'm very fortunate that my father chose Canada and I'm extremely grateful that Ontario accepted him. Today, more than 300,000 people of Portuguese descent live in Ontario.

Mr. Speaker, today Canada and Portugal share similar values that define our societies: freedom, human rights and democracy. Portuguese Canadians in Ontario have helped make our province culturally rich and more economically prosperous. Ontarians will be taking part in many events and festivals to mark Portuguese History and Heritage Month this June. This included the Portugal Day parade yesterday, on Sunday, June 9. I was pleased to be joined by many colleagues and the Premier at this event, which is one of the largest festivals in Toronto.

Ontario's diversity sets us apart in the world and makes it a place where people want to live, work and raise children.

Thank you to all and to everyone honouring the dynamic Portuguese diaspora of Ontario, and a special congratulations to the diamond jubilee pioneers as we raise the flag on the lawn of Queen's Park this afternoon in their honour.

Colleagues, on behalf of the Legislative Assembly of Ontario, we're pleased to join with the community in celebrating Portuguese History and Heritage Month here in Ontario. Thank you, and thank you, Mr. Sousa.

Remarks in Portuguese.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Statements by ministers?

It is now time for responses.

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: I'm pleased to respond to the minister's comments, and I'd like to start by introducing Filomena da Silva, who is of Portuguese heritage. She is a stalwart of the PC support staff. When I first arrived here in 1995, Filomena was one of the first people to meet me. She sort of showed you the ropes as you got here, as to who you should know and who you should listen to, and, equally as important, who you shouldn't listen to. So thank you for that, Filomena; it's been a great 18 years.

It's my pleasure to rise this afternoon and respond to the minister's statement on Portuguese History and Heritage Month, as well as Portugal Day. Portugal Day is celebrated on the 10th of June each year by Portuguese citizens and emigrants throughout the world. The day commemorates the death of national literary icon Luís de Camões on June 10, 1580. Camões authored Portugal's national poem celebrating Portuguese history and

achievements, focusing mainly on the 16th-century Portuguese explorations which brought fame and fortune to the country.

Here in Toronto, over 300,000 Portuguese Canadians celebrate by holding a multitude of events. The week-long festival culminates with a Portugal Day parade on Dundas Street West and Little Portugal, where participants can be seen proudly waving flags, wearing traditional costumes, singing and dancing. The parade ends near Trinity Bellwoods Park, where concerts, cultural events and various other activities proceed to take place. The Portugal Day parade is Toronto's third-largest street festival. Given the good judgment and keen weather sense of the Portuguese, they held that parade yesterday, not today. The 2013 Portugal Day parade was held yesterday under beautiful sunny skies and attracted thousands of people. Mr. Gilberto Fernandes, director with the Portuguese Canadian History Project, describes the festival as a great opportunity for Portuguese immigrants and their descendants "to celebrate themselves, to replenish their sense of solidarity and identity and also introduce and display that identity in multiple ways to other Canadians." I couldn't agree with him more.

The long and proud tradition of hosting Portugal Day celebrations in Toronto dates back to 1966, when Father Alberto Cunha, then head of the Portuguese parish at St. Mary's Catholic Church, started the historic tradition. The celebration saw thousands of people congregate in the Canadian National Exhibition Coliseum, now the Ricoh Coliseum, on the CNE grounds. Since that time, commemorations have grown over the years to become the largest public gathering of Portuguese immigrants in Canada.

Mr. Speaker, although many of the events planned have already passed for this year, I'm pleased to mention that earlier today the Portuguese flag was raised at Toronto city hall, and in just a few minutes' time, the Portuguese flag will proudly fly on the front lawn here at Queen's Park. In addition, Portugal Week events will conclude on Saturday, June 15, at Downsview Park with a performance by Shawn Desman.

It's also important to note that this Legislature passed the Celebration of Portuguese Heritage Act back in 2001, which not only proclaimed June 10 as Portugal Day but also proclaimed the whole month of June as Portuguese History and Heritage Month. The act is very fitting and, when passed, marked the 500th anniversary of the arrival of Portuguese explorers in Canada, many of whom have since settled and made their homes in Canada.

Speaker, here in the official opposition, we are incredibly proud and honoured to pay tribute to the vast cultural, social and economic contributions that Portuguese Canadians have made to Ontario and to Canada. The spirit and values expressed by Portuguese Canadians is second to none, and has indeed enriched the quality of life in our province.

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On behalf of our leader, Tim Hudak, and the entire PC caucus, we are extremely pleased to recognize Portu-

guese History and Heritage Month, Portugal Day, and pay tribute to all Portuguese Canadians.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: Bom dia a todos. Good afternoon, Mr. Speaker. Today we are here to celebrate Portugal Day, along with marking June as Portuguese Heritage Month.

I am proud of my Portuguese heritage, and it is important to me and my family to see our culture not just represented but celebrated. In my riding of London-Fanshawe, we have an incredibly strong Portuguese community, and I am so grateful to represent them as the member of provincial Parliament.

Portuguese Heritage Month celebrates the extraordinary contributions of more than 400,000 Portuguese Canadians, and approximately 282,000 of us live here in Ontario. This past weekend in London, I celebrated with my family, friends and my community, with our own traditional barbecue of chicken and sardines, a flag-raising ceremony, accordion playing, soccer games and folk dancing. Best of all, I was able to reconnect with my friends Tony Seara of the London Portugal News; Joe Tavares, president of the Portuguese Club; and Dominic Mendes, a long-time member of the Portuguese Club of London; and many other amazing people who make our Portuguese celebrations in London so friendly and inviting for everyone, regardless of their background.

Like many cultures, we struggle to keep our language and traditions alive and at the forefront for our children. There are more than 250 million Portuguese speakers worldwide, making it the fifth most-spoken language in the world, yet in Ontario, there are only 1,400 students who speak Portuguese as their mother tongue at home. This is why I'm so grateful for the work of the people like Tony, Joe and Dominic and others who help to make those connections for our children to our language and to our culture. For them, it's more than soccer games and barbecues, and we are indebted to the people who live that notion fully.

Mr. Speaker, my people have long been known as world explorers who travelled the globe and also regularly to Canada during the 15th and 16th centuries. However, it was back in May 1953 when large numbers of Portuguese from Azores and Madeira fled political conflict and came to settle into the downtown core of Canada's major cities like Toronto's Portugal village, represented by my colleague Jonah Schein, in Davenport, and Rosario Marchese, in Trinity-Spadina. These immigrants had something in common; they left their homes to pursue a better life for their families. They came and thrived and they helped make this province great.

Their influence continues to this day, with notable Portuguese Canadians rising up from their efforts: people like Paul Ferreira, New Democratic Party member of provincial Parliament, MPP, for York South-Weston from February 2007 to October 2007; Ana Lopes, chair of the Toronto Symphony Orchestra's board of directors, vice-chair of the CAMH Foundation's board of directors; and Anthony De Sa, a Canadian novelist and short story writer. His debut short story collection, *Barnacle Love*,

was a short-listed finalist for the 2008 Scotiabank Giller Prize and the 2009 Toronto Book Awards.

Mr. Speaker, today is Portugal Day, a day for celebrating another great Portuguese man who brought our history and culture alive through his words: Luís de Camões. Luis de Camões is considered Portugal's greatest poet. His works have been compared to that of Shakespeare, Virgil and Dante. He is best remembered for his epic work *The Lusiads*. This is the day that marks the day of his death, but we also choose to celebrate it as Portugal's national day, a day where we celebrate our unique contributions throughout the world and especially here in our new home.

PETITIONS

PHYSIOTHERAPY SERVICES

Mr. Rob Leone: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Ministry of Health is planning on cutting physiotherapy services to seniors in long-term-care homes—from an estimated \$110 million to \$58.5 million; and

"Whereas with this change seniors will not receive the care they are currently entitled to through their current OHIP physiotherapy providers, who the government plans to delist from OHIP on August 1st, 2013; and

"Whereas the government has announced that the funding level, the number of treatments a resident could receive, has not been specified and will be reduced from a maximum of 150 visits/year to some unknown level, which means the hours of care and number of staff providing seniors with physiotherapy will also be significantly reduced as of August 1st, 2013; and

"Whereas our current OHIP physiotherapy providers have been providing seniors with individualized treatments for over 48 years, and these services have been proven to help seniors improve in their activities of daily living, mobility, pain and falls risk;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To review and reverse this drastic cut of OHIP physiotherapy services to seniors, our most vulnerable population, and to continue with \$110 million physiotherapy funding for seniors in long-term-care homes."

Interjection.

Mr. Rob Leone: I recognize that the Minister of Health is heckling me during petitions. I'm pleased to sign these petitions and give them to page Alex.

AUTOMOBILE INSURANCE

Mr. Michael Prue: I have a petition that reads as follows:

"Whereas Ontario also has the highest average premiums in Canada;

"Whereas auto insurance rates are regulated by the Ontario government through the Financial Services Commission of Ontario (FSCO);

"Whereas Ontario insurance reforms in 2010 are saving companies almost \$2 billion in the value of 'statutory' accident payouts each year but the government is still allowing companies to increase drivers' premiums;

"Whereas it is unfair for drivers to pay higher premiums when the industry is enjoying billions in savings each year;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly as follows:

"That the government direct the Financial Services Commission of Ontario (FSCO) to bring the average Ontario auto insurance premium down by 15% by the end of 2013."

It is signed by hundreds of people in the Peterborough area, and I'm pleased to affix my signature thereto and send it down with page Jeffrey.

WIND TURBINES

Mr. Bill Walker: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas residents of Ontario, mayors and councillors from more than 80 municipalities and Ontario's largest farm organizations and rural stakeholders, the Ontario Federation of Agriculture and the Christian Farmers Federation of Ontario, seek an immediate moratorium on new wind development until an independent and comprehensive health study has determined that turbine noise is safe to human health; and

"Whereas the provincial Liberal government's study back in 2011 failed to conclude anything more than that it needed to continue to study the turbine sound impacts; and

"Whereas the federal government is launching, through Health Canada, the first comprehensive study of health impacts of wind turbines;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Liberal government follow the federal lead, accept the objective of the federal wind study, agree and accept that until the study is finished it will not approve any new wind turbine projects in Ontario, effective immediately."

I support this petition, will affix my name and send it with page Simon to the Clerks' desk. Thank you.

HIGHWAY IMPROVEMENT

Mr. Michael Mantha: I'm pleased to rise on behalf of the people of Algoma-Manitoulin, also throughout southern Ontario, who have benefited by having the Chi-Cheemaun run, to read:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Ministry of Transportation designates specific highways for upgrading and resurfacing;

"Whereas Highway 551 has been designated for resurfacing in 2013-2015;

"Whereas Highway 551 is a tourist cycling destination and lack of paved shoulders pose significant risk for users;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Ministry of Transportation include paved shoulders in order to make Highway 551 safer for all road users and to promote cycling as a healthy and environmentally friendly activity."

I fully support this petition, and I will present it to page Alex to bring it down to the Clerks.

LYME DISEASE

Mr. Robert Bailey: This petition's to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the tick-borne illness known as chronic Lyme disease, which mimics many catastrophic illnesses such as multiple sclerosis, Crohn's, Alzheimer's, arthritic diabetes, depression, chronic fatigue and fibromyalgia, is increasingly endemic in Canada, but scientifically validated diagnostic tests and treatment choices are currently not available in Ontario, forcing patients to seek these in the USA and Europe;

"Whereas the Canadian Medical Association informed the public, governments and the medical profession in the May 30, 2000, edition of their professional journal that Lyme disease is endemic throughout Canada, particularly in southern Ontario;

"Whereas the Ontario public health system and the Ontario health insurance plan currently do not fund those specific tests that accurately serve the process of establishing a clinical diagnosis, but only recognize testing procedures known in the medical literature to provide false negatives at 45% to 95% of the time;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to request the Minister of Health to direct that the Ontario public health system and OHIP include all currently available and scientifically verified tests for acute and chronic Lyme diagnosis, to do everything necessary to create public awareness of Lyme disease in Ontario, and to have internationally developed diagnostic and successful treatment protocols available to patients and physicians."

I agree with this petition, affix my signature and send it down with Jeffrey.

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CHILDREN'S AID SOCIETIES

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Ontario government has approved a new funding formula within a fixed funding envelope for children's aid societies which are mandated by legislation to provide child protection services;

"Whereas this new 'fairer' funding model has resulted in a \$50.6-million funding shortfall for agencies across Ontario for 2013-14;

"Whereas due to inadequate funding and the introduction of 'accountability measures' which prevent agencies from running deficits, agencies will be forced to balance budgets by cutting staff and services;

"Whereas those services first cut will be services aimed at preventing abuse and neglect and supporting families, thereby allowing more families to remain intact and fewer children being brought into care, in addition to cuts to supports" for the foster family, "for foster parents, and other programs to support kids;

"Whereas chronic underfunding to the Highland Shores Children's Aid Society will result in cuts to the services as a result of cuts to staff, thereby jeopardizing the ability of the agency to meet its mandate to protect children;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Ontario government fund [the] \$50.6 million funding shortfall, fix the funding formula to ensure that agencies can maintain services including prevention services and put an immediate halt to staffing cuts that hurt services."

I sign my name to this petition and give it to page Melanie to deliver.

WORKPLACE INSURANCE

Mr. Jim McDonell: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas beginning 1 January 2013 WSIB was expanded to include groups of employers and principals who had previously been exempt from WSIB and had private insurance; and

"Whereas this new financial burden does nothing to improve worker safety and only drives up the cost of doing business in Ontario; and

"Whereas the chair of the WSIB—in committee meetings last year—admitted this will not help cover the accumulated WSIB debt, but" will only "make the problem worse by adding further liabilities;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To repeal the statutory obligations created by Bill 119."
I will be signing this.

HIGHWAY 66

Mr. John Vanthof: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Virginiatown residents that reside on 27th Street object to the proposed entrance identified for North Virginiatown in the realignment plans for Highway 66;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the main entrance to North Virginiatown be located on 25th Street since there is no residential activity and that the Minister of the Environment issue a part II (bump up) for this project."

I fully agree, sign my signature and give it to page Jessica.

PHYSIOTHERAPY SERVICES

Mr. Jerry J. Ouellette: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas the Ministry of Health is planning to delist OHIP physiotherapy clinics as of August 1st, 2013, which represents cuts in physiotherapy services to seniors, children and people with disabilities who currently receive care at designated OHIP physiotherapy clinics; and

"Whereas people who are currently eligible for OHIP physiotherapy treatments can receive 100 treatments per year plus an additional 50 treatments annually if medically necessary. The proposed change will reduce the number of allowable treatments to 12 per year; while enhancing geographical access is positive, the actual physiotherapy that any individual receives will be greatly reduced; and

"Whereas the current OHIP physiotherapy providers have been providing seniors, children and people with disabilities with individualized treatments for over 48 years, and these services have been proven to help improve function, mobility, activities of daily living, pain, and falls risk;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To review and reverse the decision to drastically cut OHIP physiotherapy services to our most vulnerable population—seniors, children and people with disabilities; and to maintain the policy that seniors, children and people with disabilities continue to receive up to 100 treatments per year at eligible clinics, with a mechanism to access an additional 50 treatments when medically necessary."

I affix my signature in support.

DRUG PLANS

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: "Whereas the professional relationship a patient has with her or his pharmacist is fundamental to their care and patient choice underpins this relationship, drug plans that restrict this choice undermine this relationship and the patient care that is received;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"The government of Ontario shall enact and enforce legislation that prohibits any and all parties from creating and facilitating in any way drug plans that restrict patient choice of the pharmacy and pharmacist that best meets their health care needs. This includes, but is not limited to, prohibiting drug plans that provide discriminatory levels and types of reimbursement to pharmacies and pharmacists within Ontario."

I sign this and give it to Christine to be delivered to the table.

LYME DISEASE

Mr. Steve Clark: "Whereas the tick-borne illness known as chronic Lyme disease, which mimics many catastrophic illnesses such as multiple sclerosis, Crohn's, Alzheimer's, arthritic diabetes, depression, chronic fatigue and fibromyalgia, is increasingly endemic in Canada, but scientifically validated diagnostic tests and treatment choices are currently not available in Ontario, forcing patients to seek these in the USA and Europe; and

"Whereas the Canadian Medical Association informed the public, governments and the medical profession in the May 30, 2000, edition of their professional journal that Lyme disease is endemic throughout Canada, particularly in southern Ontario; and

"Whereas the Ontario public health system and the Ontario health insurance plan currently do not fund those specific tests that accurately serve the process of establishing a clinical diagnosis, but only recognize testing procedures known in the medical literature to provide false negatives 45% to 95% of the time;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to request the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care to direct that the Ontario public health system and OHIP include all currently available and scientifically verified tests for acute and chronic Lyme disease in Ontario and to have everything necessary to create public awareness of Lyme disease in Ontario, and to have internationally developed diagnostic and successful treatment protocols available to patients and physicians."

I'm pleased to affix my name to the petition and send it to the table with page Hannah.

CHILDREN'S AID SOCIETIES

Mr. Taras Natyshak: I'm pleased to present a petition on behalf of residents of Essex county that reads:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Ontario government has approved a new funding formula within a fixed funding envelope for children's aid societies which are mandated by legislation to provide child protection services;

"Whereas this new 'fairer' funding model has resulted in a \$50.6-million funding shortfall for agencies across Ontario for 2013-14;

"Whereas due to inadequate funding and the introduction of 'accountability measures' which prevent agencies from running deficits, agencies will be forced to balance budgets by cutting staff and services;

"Whereas those services first cut will be services aimed at preventing abuse and neglect and supporting families, thereby allowing more families to remain intact and fewer children being brought into care, in addition to cuts to supports for foster parents, and other programs to support kids...;"

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Ontario government fund \$50.6-million funding shortfall, fix the funding formula to ensure that

agencies can maintain services including prevention services and put an immediate halt to staffing cuts that hurt services."

I agree with this petition, will affix my name to it and hand it to page Edgar to hand to the Clerk.

PHYSIOTHERAPY SERVICES

Mr. Toby Barrett: This petition is titled "Restore Physiotherapy Services."

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Ministry of Health has eliminated non-hospital physiotherapy service from the Health Insurance Act; and

"Whereas this will drastically reduce the number of allowable treatments to 12 per year for people who are currently eligible for 100 treatments annually; and

"Whereas under the changes scheduled for August 1, the cost of visits under the CCAC (community care access centre) model will rise to \$120 per visit, rather than the current fee of \$12.20 per visit through OHIP physiotherapy providers; and

"Whereas funding for physiotherapy services to seniors in long-term-care homes would be cut by almost 50%, from an estimated \$110 million per year to \$58.5 million per year; and

"Whereas the removal of all non-hospital OHIP coverage for physiotherapy services in the community will contribute to a decline in overall health and independence for seniors, children under 19, ODSP recipients and post-hospital surgery patients;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Parliament of Ontario as follows:

"That the delisting of OHIP physiotherapy clinics as of August 1st not proceed and that the provincial government guarantee there will be no reduction in services currently available for seniors, children and youths, people with disabilities and all those who are currently eligible for OHIP-funded physiotherapy."

I agree with this and sign it.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The time available for petitions has expired, and I'm sorry I wasn't able to recognize everyone who brought a petition this afternoon.

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ORDERS OF THE DAY

STRONGER PROTECTION FOR ONTARIO CONSUMERS ACT, 2013

LOI DE 2013 RENFORÇANT

LA PROTECTION

DU CONSOMMATEUR ONTARIEN

Resuming the debate adjourned on June 6, 2013, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 55, An Act to amend the Collection Agencies Act, the Consumer Protection Act, 2002 and the Real Estate

and Business Brokers Act, 2002 and to make consequential amendments to other Acts / Projet de loi 55, Loi modifiant la Loi sur les agences de recouvrement, la Loi de 2002 sur la protection du consommateur et la Loi de 2002 sur le courtage commercial et immobilier et apportant des modifications corrélatives à d'autres lois.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Mr. Jeff Yurek: I'm pleased to rise and speak to Bill 55. I've been trying to get up and speak for the last couple of weeks, but I seem to run out of time before I get going.

There are three sections of this bill: the Collection Agencies Act, Consumer Protection Act, and Real Estate and Business Brokers Act. I think most of my comments will be on number two, the Consumer Protection Act, with regard to the sale of water heaters and giving that 20-day cooling-off period.

I do agree that there's something wrong in the system that we need to take a look at, because if you look at most of our constituency offices, particularly mine, a number of calls coming through my office do in fact deal with people who have had trouble signing contracts at the door, in particular with water heaters, and then asking us to help remedy the situation.

I brought two cases that were in my office that I thought I'd just read about that are pretty interesting. One is Mr. X. I'll use the name X because I wouldn't want to use the real name. He'd like us to look into consumer issues with a particular company that was selling door to door. He says a rep came to his house telling him his water heater had to be replaced and that the current one was running through the flue but had to actually go through the chimney. He thought that he could just purchase the tank outright, but the rep went on to tell him about replacing the doors and windows to be more energy-efficient and that that would get him a return from the government for the investment.

When he replaced the doors and windows, he did receive a rebate of \$4,800, which he tried to apply to the water tank purchase. The company then told him that he had to rent the tank for seven years at a cost of \$139.99 a month and could purchase it at the end for \$6,400, and that it could not be removed from the home because of depreciation. They recently told them it was \$9,800. He asks, how does a heater cost up to \$20,000 by the end of a seven-year term? He doesn't think it's right.

Another constituent of mine contacted—her mother had somebody at the door calling her. She has early-stage dementia, and before she knew it she had signed off on the contract.

So I think it's particularly important that we do have this cooling-off period between 20 days, but I think the bill kind of missed the mark in the fact that we need to look at how they cancel the bill. What steps do they have to take to actually call and get someone on the phone to cancel the bill? Many of these clients have called the businesses to lodge a complaint or to try to terminate the contract and failed on all occasions because so many

roadblocks had been put up in trying to cancel the contract. So I think this bill would have helped consumers a lot better if the government took action to somehow make it easier for someone to cancel the contract instead of having to go through the various phone calls or letters to be sent in order to cancel the contract.

I spoke in a two-minute hit on this earlier. I mentioned the problem that I had cancelling my Bell TV contract when I had decided their services were no longer necessary in my house, and the fact that it took hours upon hours to actually get hold of someone, before they threw me all this information of extras, trying to keep me. I finally had to say, "No, enough is enough." But I don't think we need to be dealing with going through the hoops.

Somebody who signed a water heater contract, say, who maybe had dementia—for them, given the fact of having to make all those phone calls and trying their hardest, they're most likely going to give up and just end up paying the bill. I think this is where this bill should have focused upon.

The other thing that would have made it easier is the enforcement of this bill. I don't know how you're going to have enforcement officers roaming the streets to ensure that these people aren't knocking door to door to sign off the contracts. In fact, we could probably have an easier enforcement if we were monitoring the companies and how they respond to a cancelling of these bills.

So I think it's very, very important that the government takes a look at this in committee when it reaches there and decides how we can actually look at helping people cancel their contract after 20 days.

The other part in this bill: It mentions "direct agreement that requires the supplier to supply to the consumer a water heater or other goods or services that are prescribed" by the regulations. I'd like to know what those other goods or services are. I know they're picking on water heater sales at this point but, I mean, we've had talk about vacuum sales—I don't think there's many going on any more—encyclopedia sales. We've got charities coming to the door. We've got Girl Guides. How far is this going to go with sales and not allowing people to go door to door, period? I don't know if that's the answer this Legislature wants to go, but I think that might be overshooting the goal.

The other point in here is that it also says the supplier can't really supply the goods or service until that 20-day period is over, which brings to mind: What if your water heater died? You've had it in your house and you don't want to buy a new one; you'd rather go to a rental system. Is there a place in this legislation that will allow them to override that 20-day waiting period, or do they have to go without hot water per se? I'd like that to be spelled out a little more in committee or in further debate as it comes up in this Legislature. I'm hoping there is some wiggle room in this bill so that we can deal with the little hiccups that occur in our day-to-day situations.

I'd like to just note that if this comes down to customer service—and I think that's what we in this

Legislature should be promoting throughout all business in Ontario. We seem to have stepped away from customer service, the old days of ma-and-pa shops out there that survived on customer service alone and not just basically on price. I think that maybe we need to somehow exemplify through the Ministry of Consumer Services promoting the fact that people should be looking at where the customer service comes from instead of just going with the lowest-cost provider when dealing with their personal purchases.

I come from an independent pharmacy, and I can tell you that the hardest thing we can do is compete on price with the big Shoppers Drug Marts, Walmarts etc. Our whole focus, which is something my father started 50 years ago this year—he opened up the pharmacy in September 1963, and we've lasted 50 years, a testament to his complete focus on customer service. I think that is tremendous in this day. His focus has always been on customer service, and he definitely put that into my brother and I growing up and working at the pharmacy, and all my brothers and sisters, really. Price does matter, but customer service matters more, and if you can keep your focus on that, you can keep your business open.

I think this would be an opportunity, maybe, for the government to go hand in hand with some sort of promotion of the fact that the people of Ontario should be focusing on what services they get from these businesses that are coming door to door—the fact that we will help them cancel their contracts, but really look at what you get at the end of the day and what services you can really focus on.

I'm glad that I'm up here speaking on this bill. As I said before, the Consumer Protection Act part of it is a paragraph long focusing about water heaters, but there are a couple spots that I think they need to look at. As I said before, how do they cancel the contract once they get there? How hard is it going to be for them to actually dial up or call someone or write to someone in order to cancel the contract? What happens if there's an emergency and they need immediate installation of the hot water tank, and what provisions are in place for the removal of the hot water tank? I'm sure that's spelled out in the contract.

As the member from Oxford stated before, he had a heck of a time getting rid of his hot water tank because they didn't really want to come and take it away. They had him take it apart, he had to disconnect it—they let him do all the work—and then just told him, "Could you dispose of it yourself as well?" I think that at the same time, when people are looking at the customer service aspect of it, they should look at the end the contract: How is that water tank removed and taken for disposal?

Mr. Speaker, I'd just like to wrap up. I'll be more than glad to speak on the other two parts of the bill and have a discussion at committee. Hopefully it goes to the general government committee where I sit, and we can have a good discussion with regard to the Collection Agencies Act, which, due to the way this economy has headed in the past 10 years and the fact that more people are having

to go to these agencies to get their cheques cashed or to get ahead a little bit before the bills come crushing down on them, and also the Real Estate and Business Brokers Act, which is always excellent to ensure—the member from Prince Edward—Hastings passed his bill regarding electronic signatures for real estate transactions. I think that's a step into the 21st century for this government, and I'm glad that a member of our party brought that forward to make that change. I think this little bit here, knowing the history of how many offers have come forward on your property, is very good.

I'm going to have a quick sit and listen to the two-minute hits, and come back in a few minutes.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

1400

Mr. Paul Miller: I was listening intently to the member from Elgin—Middlesex—London. He made some good points.

Speaker, actually about two years ago, I had the pleasure of meeting one of those door-to-door salespersons. Unfortunately, I think he picked the wrong door. He came to my door, and he started his pitch—a young man, very aggressive. His identification that he was showing was murky at best. I couldn't really make it out. I'm not sure whether he was with Reliance or one of those. I don't know who he was with.

He said, "Sir, I want to see your hydro and heat bills." I said, "What for? What do you want to see that for? Are you going to pay it for me?" And he said, "No, I want to compare your rate to our offer." I said, "Well, first of all, I don't know what your offer is." Personally, I don't give my bills to anybody to look at except me. I said, "You can tell me what your offer is without looking at my bill."

He didn't really want to do that, but finally, he came out with his little presentation, and of course, I kind of sliced and diced it like a Veg-O-Matic. It didn't really make sense. Whatever I would say, if it countered what he was saying, he would twist it and adapt very quickly. So I'm sure that they take training lessons to deal with difficult consumers at the door. I certainly was not giving him an easy ride.

It got to the point where he said to me, "Well, you know, you don't know what you're doing"—like he's actually insulting the consumer. I'm saying, "Well, this isn't a very good presentation at the door. You're telling me I don't know what I'm doing or I don't know what I'm talking about, and you do?" I said, "Where do you come to that conclusion?"

He became a little bit argumentative, and I said, "My friend, do you see the end of the driveway? You'd better start heading that way because I've had enough." This guy was so aggressive that I actually phoned and reported him, and they had had about 40 complaints that week about the same guy. Now I can just imagine if it was a senior, that they would have been intimidated, and what they would've had to go through—terrible stuff.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments.

Mr. Shafiq Qadri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for an opportunity and responsibility to speak about Bill 55, the Stronger Protection for Ontario Consumers Act. I of course commend my fellow health care worker, a pharmacist, the MPP for Elgin–Middlesex–London. I cannot resist but saying, “Alas, poor Yurek! I knew him well.”

In any case, Speaker, I think what he’s highlighted, particularly about these aggressive sales tactics at the door with reference to the water heater issue, has been specifically addressed within this Ontario consumers act, the proposals that we’re bringing forward. I’ll just detail some of them; for example, requiring plain language disclosure of consumer rights and key terms—although I think all of us probably notice the challenge of this oxymoron, plain language, in any kind of a contract. We’re going to prohibit delivery of the various services that are offered to add a 20-day cooling-off period, which probably the gun industry should also take note of. It provides stronger consumer remedies when these rules are breached. There should be some kind of—whether it’s judicial or some kind of complaints process, perhaps through the Consumer Protection Act itself—as well as requiring mandatory recorded verification of calls, of the key terms in contracts.

I think all members of the Legislature know—and of course, in his inimitable way our member for Hamilton East–Stoney Creek, who provided first-hand knowledge of his experience—that there are aggressive sales tactics that are going on. There are exploitative practices for those individuals who, first of all, may not have English or education at a certain level to be able to deal with these kinds of tactics; for example, older folks in my riding. It’s almost like they’re attempting to please the person who comes to the door. Of course that can, once signed on the dotted line, lead to a lot of heartache and financial costs over the future.

So let’s support this bill.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments.

Mr. Bill Walker: It’s my pleasure to speak to the remarks that my colleague from Elgin–Middlesex–London made. I think he said a lot when he said 50 years in the pharmacy business that his dad had started, Yurek Pharmacy—and him and his brother Peter continuing on that proud tradition. I think pharmacists are one of the most trusted professionals that we have in our country and in the world, Mr. Speaker. I think if people just followed their act more, we wouldn’t need things like the Consumer Protection Act, but unfortunately there are those unscrupulous people who put a lot pressure on at the front door. That, again, is typically to our seniors, who are intimidated very easily and, unfortunately, sign on the dotted line without really knowing what they’ve got themselves into.

We believe that this bill has kind of gone forward in the right intent. It has the right spirit of intent. We do not condone and certainly will not support high-pressure sales tactics. Our critic the member from Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry has also stepped up and apprised us of that.

We’ll be supporting, I think generally, this bill. But what we want to do is get to committee. It has kind of gone halfway in a lot of the measures they’ve taken. They really haven’t addressed some of the areas that we think they could have, and that’s typical of many of the things I’ve seen here in my year and a half. They kind of trot out an idea because it sounds good in public. It sounds good in a 30-second sound bite, but when you actually start reading the details—

Interjection: Window dressing.

Mr. Bill Walker: Window dressing is absolutely correct—they’ve missed the boat on a number of things, or they haven’t gone far enough to truly do them. They make it sound like they’re solving the issue, but they really haven’t.

We definitely want that to get to committee. We want to ensure that the public has confidence. If the public does not have confidence in something they’re buying, they typically won’t buy it. Then it’s a set downward spiral, and Lord knows our economy right now is in a shambles due to mismanagement over the last nine years of this Liberal government and the debt that they’ve put us into. We need the confidence of the consumers to get our market going, to ensure that those 600,000 people who they have allowed to be unemployed come back to work so they can again contribute effectively to our economy.

This bill is one that is a step in the right direction. Like many of their efforts, it’s a step, but there’s a lot more steps to do. We’d like to get it to committee and be able to help them make it a strong bill.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Taras Natyshak: I’m pleased to add to the comments presented by the member for Elgin–Middlesex–London, and I’m also pleased to commend the Minister of Consumer Services. I do respect her work. I applaud the fact that she has made these first steps in her inaugural role as the minister.

We all recognize that these are the types of problems that come into our office quite often, when it comes to high-pressure sales tactics and areas of sales that really aren’t regulated. What does strike me as interesting is that we hear from the official opposition that they’re considering actually exploring some measures of regulation; whereas we hear in their various white papers and, ultimately, their ideological narrative that they are anti-regulation in all formats. So I’m interested to see exactly what it is that they want to regulate on the free market.

What we’re talking about is unfettered free-market capitalist agendas, ones that say, “Here’s the product. We’re going to sell it to you. We’re going to sell it to you, shift it in all ways, in all mechanisms. It doesn’t matter who gets hurt in the process.” As New Democrats, we certainly recognize that there is a need for regulations, whether it be in water heaters, in financial institutions or in lending institutions, and ones that require us to do our due diligence as members in this House to provide oversight, scrutinize the current regulations and impose new regulations where they are warranted.

I am pleased to talk about this, not as an offence to the free market but as an addition to those companies that actually are providing good services, such as the one that the member operates as a pharmacist. I'm proud to announce that my wife is a fifth-generation business owner: 83 years in the car sales industry. They've done things the right way and have succeeded because they've taken a really clean approach to those types of transactions. They're heavily regulated. I'm certain we can find some areas where we can regulate these types of industries.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I return to the member for Elgin—Middlesex—London, who has two minutes.

Mr. Jeff Yurek: I'd like to thank the member from Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, the member from Etobicoke North, Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound and, of course, the member for Essex.

I have to say, Speaker, I don't know what's going on here today, but there's a heck of a lot of Shakespeare in this House from question period and this afternoon.

Mr. Robert Bailey: You protest too much.

Mr. Jeff Yurek: Yes, I protest too much. Thanks.

Anyways, I'd just like to reiterate what has been said earlier. I think the key is to ensure that, when people want to cancel their contracts, not only do they have the 20-day period to cancel it but also that they actually are able to call and not get frustrated and give up or have to come and protest at the MPP's office. My office—and all our offices, I'm sure—will continue to advocate for our constituents, but I think this is a fix that the government can help with and ensure that that's less likely to occur.

I'd also like to talk about the bills, someone knocking on your door and asking for your bill. Just remember, everybody watching at home, that you don't have to show anybody at your door anything that's personally yours, no matter how they ask for it or say they'll give you a deal. The best bet is if they're asking for something and you didn't invite them to your house, then show them the door. Get a phone number and call and speak to somebody else on the phone. Or go to a shop where they're located and have a one-on-one discussion. I wouldn't share anything at the door.

1410

I got a text while people were talking here. Somebody offered that maybe we should look at giving the constituents of our ridings a 20-day cool-off period after they elect someone just to ensure they've made the right decision. So maybe that's somewhere down the road; we could take a look at if they've made that decision—if we elect someone in and they perhaps say they're going to start a health tax even though they promised not to do so, we'd have that chance to say, no, we're not going to allow that.

Sorry, I got off topic there, Speaker, I think, for everybody listening to my remarks. I appreciate the member from Haldimand—Norfolk, who will probably be up next.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Mr. Paul Miller: I just want to start off by saying that I can't tell you how many complaints I've had in my office in the last five to six years about this situation, about door-to-door people getting people to sign up to these contracts. They get tied in, but the key to this is trying to get out of it. They ignore registered letters. They ignore phone calls. Actually, one of my neighbours got involved, and it took him a year and a half to get out of it. How did they get out of it? They finally had to go to their MPP and MP to get a direct letter sent to threaten to take their licence away if they didn't comply with the answer of the consumer, and finally they did. But that's pretty sad, because a lot of people that get into these situations are overwhelmed, very upset. It's costing them a lot of money and they don't know where to turn. So it's really unscrupulous of these outfits to do that type of consumer relationship.

Certainly protection is long overdue. The first real stories that came to my attention were about the aggressive door-to-door people, the resellers. Now, hot on their heels we have the water heater salespeople. This has become so upsetting for people that I know of one taxpayers' group that sends out emails and e-alerts to their membership as soon as the first one of these salespeople comes on their radar or into their community. The ratepayers are encouraged to tell their neighbours, especially seniors, that they do not and should not let any of these door-to-door salespeople into their house, and not to give them any information at all about anything, no matter how nice they may seem.

I know that energy resellers basically demanded to see the monthly statements for hydro and gas, with some actually keeping the statements. In my case, they actually demanded to see mine and they didn't make out too well. This provided the reseller with lots of personal account and payment plan information, giving them enough, possibly, to create false accounts or whatever other unsavoury purpose the information could be used for.

It's bad enough that these salespeople are aggressive toward our most vulnerable citizens, but they appear to make it up as they go. They create stories to convince the consumer as they go. Pretty scary stuff, Speaker. Tactics extract the most information they can from the homeowner; they then turn that back into their sales pitch. They often word their pitch so that one would assume that they are employed or represent the local hydro or gas company, or even the municipality. Then they gain access to the home. The deceit about the hot water heater is bad enough, but then what other information do they get while in the house? How much more vulnerable does a senior become once these people gain their trust and actually get inside their home?

We need to find ways to educate our constituents on how to deal with these door-to-door salespeople. We need to get this information to every household and be sure that it is fully understood. For the energy resellers, one person suggested that a sticker be issued by the Ontario Energy Board or other such body that could be dated and fixed on the front door stating the contract

signed after the date on the sticker will automatically be void. This would work most often for children who care for their elderly parents who do not live with them, at least providing some sort of warning to keep these resellers away from their parents.

But what we can do and must do, first, is establish a consumer advocate office with enough teeth to be able to get real control of the Wild West door-to-door sales of hot water heaters, energy or other such necessities.

Some of the measures suggested in the bill look good on paper, but it's practical application where the difficulties can arise. For example, if a senior has been taken by a salesperson, they may be very embarrassed about it, and rather than tell someone, they just suffer through their error and the contract, which could bring them to severe financial distress. So even a longer cooling-off period might not be enough in situations like that. We should consider a mechanism that kicks in when someone in the family, the MPP or, for that matter, the consumer advocate becomes aware of these types of situations. And the penalties for those who have misled consumers and sold them a new hot water heater, new energy contract or whatever should be significant, not only for the salesperson but for the company they propose to represent. We should have the ability to require that all the personal information that a salesperson or the company they work for has obtained about a consumer is completely removed from their records.

Another area where our most vulnerable get duped is in debt settlement. There are bona fide trustees who deal with severe financial difficulties and who are regulated. The debt settlement group appear to operate without set rules and certainly without proper fee structures. They offer to dramatically reduce a person's debt by negotiating with their creditors but demand that the consumer pay a hefty upfront fee. Often, the result of this transaction is that the debt is not satisfactorily settled, and the consumer is paying even more in upfront fees and now new administration fees to the settlement firm as well. This is just bad behaviour, and it should be unlawful. Often, those who seek this kind of intervention in their financial matters are close to the edge of bankruptcy and financial ruin. They are vulnerable, Speaker. They turn to debt settlement companies to help them get back on their feet and to help them regain financial security, and what do they get? What looks like a legal scam. How can this not already have been made illegal?

It reminds me of a mall gift card scenario. In this one, the full value of the card is good for 14 to 16 months after the purchase date. Then the administration fees begin reducing the value of the gift card each month until there's nothing left. Other gift cards apparently have no expiry date. Are they devalued by the same administration fee scam? We don't know. Why would this be acceptable in Ontario?

Bill 55 proposes to prohibit payment of upfront fees, those charged before services are provided, and to limit the amount of fees charged overall. Both of these limits could be set by regulation.

It would also allow debtors to cancel their agreement without giving a reason within 10 days after receiving a copy of the agreement and it would prohibit misleading sales practices and advertising. The problem is when it takes longer than 10 days for a consumer or their family to realize that they need to cancel this agreement. In the case of those in the care of family, they may not have let their family know of their crisis within the time frame set out. Perhaps wording that sets out the 10 days as starting when a family member, MPP or consumer advocate becomes aware of the contract would better protect the consumer.

The real estate transactions that are mentioned in this bill would allow real estate agents to charge both flat fees and commissions. It would require that the representatives of buyers must put all offers in writing. Bill 55 also would require brokerages acting on behalf of the seller to retain copies of all written offers related to the sale and purchase of a property. I can't believe that this isn't already the case, but I guess it isn't.

Then, to make Ontario consistent with the rest of Canada and to comply with the recommendations of the Competition Bureau, the bill would remove the ban on charging both fees and commissions. The full impact of that will need to be thoroughly discussed before I personally am comfortable with it.

The needs of the consumer must be paramount in any change of this nature, and the consumer must be fully informed of this change and how it impacts their transactions.

The changes set out in Bill 55 are very small steps that seem to be going in the right direction, but we really need to hear from consumers and experts in these fields to get a good handle on whether they are good enough at all. We need a strong consumer advocate office. Full information about that office and other avenues for consumers to follow for dispute resolution must be handed to each consumer before any transaction has started. That would require the debt settlement agents to give and explain an information sheet about the consumer advocate, the local MPP and a local legal aid clinic to each consumer before they have any discussions and before they start. The debt settlement agents, real estate agents and hot water heater energy resellers and any other like persons would be equally required to give a consumer this type of information first before they do anything.

I would require, in cases where it's clear that a consumer doesn't fully understand the obligations in any of these scenarios, that the agent, reseller or other seller must first refer the person to the advocate, MPP or legal aid clinic. In this way, there's at least cost-free places for these vulnerable Ontarians to have an assessment of their situation—

Interjection.

Mr. Paul Miller: It's really good, Speaker. My own caucus talks when I'm talking. That's really good.

Requiring these agents to take the first—

Interjection.

Mr. Paul Miller: The worst is Mr. Bisson, by the way.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I'm going to have to call the New Democrat members to order.

I return to the member for Hamilton East-Stoney Creek.

Mr. Paul Miller: Requiring these agents to take the first proactive—

Interjection.

Mr. Paul Miller: I think I'm going to let Mr. Bisson finish my 10 minutes because he seems to be talking more than me.

I might as well close it up because we're not getting too far here with the noise. In closing, Speaker, I'd just like to say it's time we stop letting people rip off the people of this province and we stood up for them. It's time that we start protecting consumers, because they're the people who are the engine of this province, and we certainly don't want any of the oil spilling out in some unscrupulous manner.

1420

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: I don't think you will be surprised, but I agree totally with my friend from Hamilton East-Stoney Creek. He said it very clearly, that our most vulnerable people and not-so-vulnerable people who have been taken in by these door-to-door sellers—we should put a stop to it.

I continue to hear people, especially those seniors who are calling my office, asking for help because they have been put in such a situation. We need to help those people. Any one of us—because you've heard me talking about my own experience when someone wants me to register in their buy cheap energy program, which is not buy cheap. But people are embarrassed to talk about it because they're embarrassed to say that they were taken for a ride by these people.

When this bill passes, we will better protect the consumer from high-pressure door-to-door sales of installed items, such as water heaters; better protect our vulnerable consumers from predatory debt settlement services; and improve the rules to protect buyers and sellers of real estate. I encourage everyone here in the House to support it, to make sure that it goes before committee. If it needs improvement at committee, please do it, but this has to move forward.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Bill Walker: I must commend you, Speaker. I think it's the first time in the House that I've been here when you've had to admonish members of the member who was speaking. The member from Hamilton East-Stoney Creek—his own members were heckling so loudly that they actually distracted him from sharing what I think was some very valuable information, and it was actually a bit disrespectful. The members from Essex and Timmins did show a bit of disrespect to their own member, and that's unfortunate, because we're talking about consumers, and the people at home probably wanted to hear what the member had to say.

What he was trying to say, when he was so rudely interrupted by those members, was that he's concerned about the most vulnerable people in society being taken advantage of by unscrupulous salespeople with high-pressure tactics at the door.

I applaud the member who introduced this bill. They've put in there a cooling-off period, which I think is appropriate. No one should have to sign, then regret that and live through the concerns and challenges that may arise from that. The one concern I have, or at least one of the concerns I have, is there's no recourse when someone has done that and signed off in this bill. It's kind of a half-measure bill. They had good intent at the start of the process, but they certainly didn't finalize and put some real standard pieces in there that I think they could have.

They've suggested that in real estate, there have to be written offers. Again I think that's good, because that will hopefully stop the practice that has happened in the past of people jacking up the price by saying there's another offer, so we'll have to see that. But again, in many of these cases, what we need to do is make it more wholesome. We need to ensure that there are actual actions in the bill that will allow recourse for these still-unscrupulous practices.

We need to ensure that, at the end of the day, we put confidence back in the consumer. This government has had a huge, terrible run over the last nine years that has put our finances in dire straits. They've doubled the debt. The consumer out there is already shaky. They've lost trust in the government. They've lost integrity and credibility with the public. Speaker, a bill like this is a small step forward to try to bring some of that confidence back, but if they just stopped the scandals and if they'd step up and actually own up to those scandals, I think the consumer would have a lot more confidence at that point. This bill will be a step, but we need to improve it in committee.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: It's a pleasure to stand for the people of this province and to comment on our party member from Hamilton East-Stoney Creek and his comments. He was, of course, correct: We are supporting this bill. He was also correct in saying that it's a very small step forward, as were others around the House, and that the bill needs to be strengthened and it needs to be strengthened at committee. So I look forward to the discussion there.

One glaring omission that should have been part of this bill, it seems to me—because it does open up some acts—is protection for those who are preyed upon by payday lenders. We've had an explosion of payday lenders across our province and across our city. Nobody wants to see a payday lender open in their neighbourhood, and yet almost every neighbourhood has them now.

The average rate of real interest they charge is over 500%. This used to be illegal. It used to be illegal. Then the federal government downloaded this practice to the

provinces. It used to be that anything over 60% was considered usury. Well, this is usury by any measure, and yet it's completely legal in our province. It's not legal in Quebec. We should have a top on how much interest can be charged, because once you borrow money, if you do not pay it back on the second, you are doomed. Of course, the people who use payday lenders are the most vulnerable of all people.

I would absolutely say to the government, if you want to really protect consumers in our province, please add in that. That's a substantial amendment, but the government could do it if they actually wanted to do it. I suggest they should want to do it, to protect the vulnerable in our province.

I look forward to hearing the other comments.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Hon. Mario Sergio: Just to add a couple of words on the wonderful comments made by the member from Hamilton East-Stoney Creek—and if the member felt that he was being heckled by his own members, I think they were trying to tell him that everybody agrees with him and we should send the bill ahead to the committee and bring it back, hopefully, amended, with better recommendations so it could become an even stronger bill.

We have to compliment and commend the Minister of Consumer Services for bringing the bill forward. I think our taxpayers do need all the protection they can get from unscrupulous door-to-door salespeople, if you will. There are good ones; there are bad ones too. I think this bill would go a long way—that's Bill 55, which offers more consumer protection.

We've had maybe 11 or 12 hours of debate on this bill. I think it's time that we move it forward. It seems to be one of those very rare occasions where a bill is being supported by all members of the House. I think we should move it forward, for second reading, to the committee. Let's get more comments from the general public, individual stakeholders. Let's bring back a better bill, and let's do it on behalf of all our people, the consumers of Ontario, our own taxpayers, our own constituents, our own voters.

I'm complimenting the bill and the minister who brought forth the bill. Let's send it on, and let's bring it back as a better bill.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That concludes the time for questions and comments. I return to the member for Hamilton East-Stoney Creek.

Mr. Paul Miller: I'd like to thank the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services—it's a rare commodity when we agree on something; that's very nice; I think that's very good—and the member from Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound, who tried to stir the pot with my own caucus a little bit, but that's okay. I understand his motivation in trying to step it up a bit.

I'd like to also thank the member from Parkdale-High Park, who made some good points—that omission that she mentioned is very glaring—and of course, my friend

the minister responsible for seniors. He always speaks eloquently when he makes his points.

This is basically one of those bills that's practically—all-party agreement. It's a no-brainer. People want to protect their family, their relatives, their neighbours, their community from unscrupulous acts that may cost all of us money in the long run and only fill the pockets of people who may be working outside the guidelines of the law, stretching it a bit and locking people into contracts that are certainly to their demise, as opposed to their benefit. We, as representatives of the people in this hallowed chamber, are here to protect them.

I think these are the types of bills that are good for people out there and save them money and keep them on the straight and narrow with some of the people that try to pull fast ones out there, and there are quite a few. They seem to crop up every year with a new idea, a new scam, a new way to push the limits of the legislation that's in place, and they always challenge it.

We certainly have to keep a vigilant eye on our consumers, and we will continue to keep a vigilant eye. I command all the members in the chamber who support this bill.

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The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Mr. Toby Barrett: I also support the bill, the Stronger Protection for Ontario Consumers Act. We know it's an omnibus bill. It covers three main areas: water heater sales, debt settlements and real estate transactions. I guess it's been 10 years since we've had legislation like this to protect the consumer, and that goes back to the Consumer Protection Act of 2002, enacted by the Honourable Tim Hudak.

So we have a bill. Bill 55 addresses three key areas in the marketplace to make the marketplace a little more fair, to provide some more choice and to help instill more confidence in our consumers. We have government for a reason, and one of those reasons is to protect consumer rights. One of those reasons is to ensure a tough environment for dishonest businesses. That is essential for consumer confidence.

We all realize the need for rules, rules that are clear, universal, understandable and accessible. Consumers should not be confused by a patchwork of regulations. Businesses, on the other hand, must know the type of environment they're expected to operate in.

Currently, a legal claim by a consumer against any less-than-honest business can take months or years to process. It often can involve skyrocketing legal costs, stress, and again a decrease in consumer confidence.

With respect to water heaters and the door-to-door sales, this legislation has a number of measures. It will double the cooling-off period. It opens the door for other cooling-off periods to be doubled. It prevents new suppliers from installing new heaters for 20 days. It makes the supplier liable for a cancellation charge if they do install before the 20-day limit. It mandates that all sales be in writing, and recorded, scripted follow-up calls must be made to the consumer.

We need the clear rules and smooth transition, leading to a more open, fair competition. This has not been the case with much of the door-to-door water heater sales business. These kinds of tactics are certainly a concern, especially when you run into a crooked water heater salesman. We've heard of customers trying to cancel the service. They're put on hold for long periods of time; they are talked out of it. Scare tactics are sometimes used. Cancellation charges can kick in that run up to hundreds of dollars.

I received information from a constituent with respect to the water heater business:

"After purchasing a house in December 2012, I realized we were being billed for services for our hot water heater rental unit through" a well-known company—I've got the name here, but I won't mention the name—"at a higher than average rate.

"I called my hot water rental service provider and found out they had been charging the previous owners of the house for a 50-gallon water heater unit that was ventilated by a power motor.

"After verifying with my customer support agent that in fact the unit in my residence was only a 40-gallon tank, non-motor ventilated, they had been overbilling the previous owners for months (maybe even years).

"When I verified these details through the unit's serial number, my agent became very quiet and I was then passed on to a customer service manager. The manager apologized and said my contract would be revised and I should be credited for the overpayments."

There's an aware consumer who was able to track it down. Not many have that ability.

You can't legislate away deception or vulnerability. We need a strengthening of the enforcement tools and to have other recourse beyond the court system. Many who are taken for a ride just cannot afford that system.

Now, we know the bill looks at debt settlement companies, and we've all heard the pitch: "Your bills are too onerous. You're overdue. You're under pressure, and there's a way out through debt consolidation." Many, eager to escape their debt concerns, unfortunately, hear what they want to hear, or hear what the settler wants them to hear. In many cases, vulnerable people resort to a debt settler.

Again, if the deal sounds too good to be true, it probably is. So we have legislation here to deal with this mandating that all contracts be in writing, setting a cap on the fee, prohibiting charging upfront fees, setting a cooling-off period—in this case, 10 days—mandating certain disclosures and forbidding certain advertising practices, and establishing penalties. Through these measures, the legislation seeks to restore confidence and security in something that many people have been abused over the years.

There are honest, experienced debt settlers out there, and they can be a godsend. A reputable debt settler can bring a wealth of experience, contacts and sometimes alternatives to bankruptcy. Again, we have government for a reason: to ensure that the good guys are in this

business and provide those alternatives, while shutting out the bad ones.

There was a story reported in the House here with regard to a young woman. She had compiled \$18,000 in credit card debt and turned to a company that had been advertised on Facebook. This young woman paid the company offering to settle her debt almost \$3,800 to help her before finding herself facing a lawsuit from the bank. Eventually, she ended up filing for bankruptcy anyway.

Real estate sales: I will wrap up with this portion of this omnibus bill. This has been mentioned. It removes restrictions against charging both a fee and a commission for selling or buying a house, while also mandating that offers for a property be made in writing and allowing the consumer to inquire with the Real Estate Council of Ontario as to whether other offers were made on that same property.

During debate, we heard talk of phantom offers. That's a practice that some real estate agents have been known to use as a high-pressure sales tactic. The end result: It distorts the marketplace.

A constituent relayed to me a face-to-face situation with respect to a very recent real estate transaction. "While looking for a house, we made an offer on one we liked. The offer was \$30,000 lower than the asking price.

"This offer was the only offer made. The real estate agent representing the sellers manipulated this offer.

"A few days after our offer went in, another couple who was interested in the property decided to make an offer because they were told by the real estate agent that the current owners were thinking of taking our offer because it was a good one (when in fact they weren't happy with our offer).

"The couple decided to go ahead with an offer which was \$10,000 over the asking price because they were afraid our offer was going to be accepted. The agent used our offer as a scare tactic to get the second offer at a higher price.

"The tactic worked, and they accepted the second offer at \$10,000 over asking price.

"After the couple moved in, they found out the house was filled with mould and the entire roof needed to be redone."

As we can see, phantom offers—both home sellers and buyers rely on accurate information—are bids that are jiggled by the agents themselves, and you're never really 100% sure about the true nature of the offers that are coming in. That's really no way to do business. These kinds of phantom offers distort the market and jacked up the price in the case I just mentioned. That doesn't help anyone. Inflated prices mean bigger mortgages, which mean more household debt and higher default rates. Again, it diminishes that trust in our real estate industry, especially when a consumer finds out they've been left out on a limb; they have nowhere to turn.

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As I mentioned, we haven't had this kind of legislation for over 10 years. We've waited quite a while for this bill. It is long overdue, and I'm willing to support it.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: I want to thank the member for Haldimand–Norfolk for his well-nuanced impression and his reasoning behind his support for this bill. I believe we have or will have close to unanimous support for it to move forward through committee, as it is, as he indicated, an omnibus bill that covers the various sectors under the Consumer Protection Act dealing with real estate agents and business brokers, as well as door-to-door salespeople and collection agencies.

I would imagine that members of this House receive a variety of calls from those various industries, as well as many others, throughout their week, ones that require us and are incumbent upon us to deal with through this body. That means enacting further regulation. That means close scrutiny on the operations of enterprise out there, outside of the walls of this building, and to understand the different approaches and tactics that are taken through sales, whether they be door-to-door or, as the member from Haldimand–Norfolk indicated, sometimes even over Facebook. The changing nature of the way that the consumer interacts with these industries requires us to be cognizant of the different approaches and potentially the different pitfalls that might put people in precarious positions.

I guess, unfortunately, we're talking about those folks who are preyed upon, because this seems to be the "unscrupulous"—that word has been used often throughout this debate—the unscrupulous operators, who are in fact predatory in their measures, pointing to the fact that many who fall prey to these are those who are seniors and new Canadians with language barriers who might not understand the intricacies of massive contractual obligations when it comes to hot water heaters or otherwise. So I'm proud to see this bill work its way through this House, this chamber, and into committee, where we can fully scrutinize it.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments.

Mr. Phil McNeely: I'd like to respond to the member from Haldimand–Norfolk and what he has said about this bill. It is now already 11 hours into debate, and it's time to pass it in second reading and get it to committee so we can get this important bill for consumers in place.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments.

Mr. Jim McDonell: I'm pleased to get up to respond to the honourable member from Haldimand–Norfolk and his carefully chosen critiques of this bill. I think it's a bill that we said we support, and we look forward to getting to committee.

It has protections in there for the most vulnerable. Door-to-door sales is something that is a long-time profession. It has its place, but we want to make sure—not only in water heaters, but really it should apply right across the industry—that tactics are fair and forthright. We see some issues there. We want to also amend it to make sure that the anti-competitiveness of the incum-

bents are clear and straightforward as well. I think we've heard some issues about that.

In real estate, we hear of the phantom offers. Again, when you're dealing with the public, it's unfortunate that sometimes there's a few people that require the additional legislation. We want to make sure that the agreements are at arm's length and fair and people know what they're getting into, and that the offers are actually there and honest, upfront.

The debt settlement, again, transparency: We want to make sure that people, when they sign a contract with somebody, know all the inputs. We're looking for clarification in just what the deals are with some of the counselling services. If you're receiving funds back from the creditor, I think that that should be made obvious so people know what they're signing.

It's something we're looking forward to getting to committee. It's going to take a little bit of a while to go through it at that time. We think that we can work with this bill and bring it through and protect the consumer in something that has been an issue. We've received a number of complaints on it, and we're looking forward to solving those issues and having the industry provide a strong future for itself.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: Again, getting up to make a comment upon the member's comments on this bill gives me a chance to talk about what's missing in it as well. This is an omnibus bill, so I was actually quite saddened and shocked to see that there was nothing in this bill about payday lending companies, who surely are the scourge of consumers in this province, charging 544% interest. That is down. I have to give credit where credit is due: to a former Minister of Consumer Services who responded. It used to be 800% to 1,000% interest. Wow. We can say, I guess, that's sort of progress. It's kind of Liberal progress.

What we really need in this province is real progress: a bill like they have in Quebec, that is law, where your maximum amount of interest charged is 35%, which is what my bill asked for years and years ago. But still we see no reaction or action from this government on actually protecting consumers who walk in to these payday lenders and are charged 20%, they think. This is how they fool people, by the way: \$20 on \$100, but it's not 20%, not even close. It's about 544% when it's annualized.

Mr. Peter Shurman: It's usurious.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: As my friend from Thornhill says, absolutely, it is usurious. It is, by very definition, usury as it used to be constituted federally, where 60% was the cut-off, and in fact it's 544%, as I said.

Buyer beware: Do not use these services. Of course, we know the people who use them are desperate. They have no one else to turn to. Those are exactly the consumers we need to be protecting: those who are desperate.

Again, this bill is good as far as it goes, but it needs to go so much further in protecting consumers in Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The member for Haldimand–Norfolk has two minutes to reply.

Mr. Toby Barrett: I think the member from Essex made mention of the “predatory” practices that we are discussing in this debate, most particularly those targeting seniors and those most vulnerable, who answer the door or pick up the phone. He particularly made mention of those who perhaps have barriers with respect to the English language and are really over a barrel when they’re subjected to some of these scams.

The member for Ottawa–Orléans indicated it is 11 hours of debate. It’s actually 11 hours and counting, going on 10 years, since we’ve had this debate in this Legislature. I concur that 11 hours is fulsome debate, but I regret that this government has let this slide for the past 10 years.

Our critic on this file, the member for Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry, also known as Sand, Dust and Gravel, SDG—and I say that with admiration—had an excellent presentation in this Legislature. In my debate and my deliberations, it helped me a great deal to read the Hansard from our critic. I look very much forward to his contribution in committee, and I’ll be making a point of reading the transcripts, the committee Hansard.

The member for Parkdale–High Park made reference to payday loans and usurious interest rates. My academic background is economics, and after I graduated, for decades I followed interest rates. Even during high-interest-rate periods, I never paid or borrowed at more than 9%, and we have to get on that issue. That’s got to be the next piece of legislation under this particular file.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Mr. Taras Natyshak: I’m of course honoured, as I always am to rise in this House to speak on any bill that comes before us as members, and particularly filled with a sense of, I guess, a little bit of joy here at the end of our session that we’re actually working out a bill without an enormous amount of hyper-partisanship. I fully admit that I’m one to jump onto the hyper-partisan bandwagon; from time to time, you get wrapped into it.

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But it’s nice to hear that we’re coming to some consensus that these issues here have to be looked at and reviewed and scrutinized and brought to committee to provide members of our communities and our province some assurance that there are protection mechanisms built into the transactions that they make on a day-to-day basis. It’s one that, and again I will reiterate, we hear from time to time, most often in our constituency offices; that people have been simply ripped off, whether it be through the door-to-door sales transactions, which I think reached a fever pitch through the deregulation process of our hydro regime in the late 1990s and early 2000s—through that process, it opened up the doors to fly-by-night sales agents who were ready to throw any deal out the door—actually, right at your front door—and who took advantage of consumers.

I stand to be corrected, but I think the initial Consumer Protection Act actually was brought in to deal with that

deregulation and the massive amount of people who were showing up at the front door to take advantage of people.

I’m pleased to add some comments here today, particularly—as was mentioned before, this is an omnibus bill which deals with three different acts: the Collection Agencies Act, the Consumer Protection Act and Real Estate and Business Brokers Act. I’m going to focus simply on the Consumer Protection Act, which deals with debt settlement services.

Those who are tuning in today would be forgiven if they were lost in the hyperbole of some of the members in this House who, more often than not, talk about deregulation and the fact that we have to step away from the free market and let that system simply regulate itself, whether it be in financial transactions or consumer transactions or even some of our vital health and safety components of food security and food review and safety. But lo and behold, we hear today, when it comes to specifics about dealing with people’s pocketbooks, there’s support, a consensus here that we have to do something.

But back to the debt settlement: Some companies that provide debt settlement services in Ontario offer to dramatically reduce a person’s debt by negotiating with creditors on their behalf, provided that the consumer pays a hefty upfront fee. So imagine that. You’re burdened with debt, whether it be university tuition debt or a car loan or something that added to your financial burden, and you’re looking for help. You’re looking for some advocacy and looking for some guidance. There are more than ample services out there, provided that you pay them up front without a guaranteed outcome in the end. They’re willing to sell you their advocacy without guaranteeing that you’re actually going to get a lower debt payment. That’s something where common sense should prevail. Those services shouldn’t be offered unless there’s a set result at the end that’s actually going to benefit that consumer.

These companies can hide behind hidden contract clauses, as well. In the bill, we’re talking about plain language, where people don’t have to scroll down an entire volume of legalese to be able to interpret exactly what their liabilities are, what their responsibilities are and what the outcomes are in the end—things that ultimately will require us to send this to committee to bring in those experts to explain what the impacts are on consumers and how we can really initiate some clarity in these types of contracts, because I think they’re valid. I think there’s a use for them. I think that the service is useful, whether they be through our traditional financial services or otherwise. But let’s make sure that people have the confidence to be able to employ these services and be certain that they’re not going to be taken advantage of yet again through the process.

Again, back to the fact that in this House we’ve seen various measures come forward that have identified problems that we hear about every day, one of which I’m quite passionate about, that I’m certain members hear about on a daily basis: the fluctuating cost in gas prices, gasoline at the pump. We have regulations through the

federal government, as well as the provincial, but we have no body with legislative teeth to hold gas companies accountable.

That's why, very early in my tenure here and in the makeup of this new Parliament, we saw a bill initiated by our members to regulate the fluctuating price of gasoline on a weekly basis. That was something that I think could have infused some confidence and some rationale in the fluctuation of gas prices. That was quickly voted down. So it's interesting to see that there's a piecemeal approach here on behalf of the government and the opposition to support various aspects of regulation when we know, in fact, that some of the most contentious areas that need regulation are the ones that they're least likely to go into; for instance, gas prices.

Also, as we saw most recently, New Democrats proposed regulation on auto insurance rates, where we see a province that has—consumers in the province of Ontario pay the highest premium at the same time as having the lowest accident rates in the country. We see that as a glaring omission in the need for regulations in our financial services specifically when it comes to auto insurance. Members, at least of the opposition, have been reluctant to add their voice to the need for regulation there. We see it as something that is essential, not only to ensure that auto insurance purchasers, consumers and drivers are protected and treated fairly, but also to ensure that the industry is not a Wild West, where rate increases can be really unjustified, as we see today.

I've spoken about, I guess, who we need to inform about these regulations. Ultimately, it will be the consumer. That information, should these provisions be passed and these amendments to the various acts be passed, should be broadcast quite broadly. We need to ensure that consumers out there understand that there are new provisions that can protect them.

But even more than that, we have to send a message, a clear signal, to these unscrupulous operators that it's no longer business as usual for them. They can no longer get away with the predatory practices, the hard-pressure tactics and sales at the door, going door to door, and no longer use really opaque language in contractual obligations to undermine the security and confidence of the consumer. We need to send that message quite clearly, and I hope that there's some mechanism and some resources built in at some point through these measures to allow the government to embark on that—a real, clear message to these operators that this is a government, this is a province, that will no longer allow people to be taken advantage of through these various mechanisms. It's something that there's no doubt there's broad appeal for, and there's certainly broad support, I would guess other than those operators who want to continue business as usual—but one that I think speaks to the fact that this House can actually, if it endeavours, accomplish something that has a tangible effect on the outside: some confidence back into these various industries.

There are so many more. My colleague from Parkdale—High Park has worked diligently on the unscrupu-

lous practices of payday lenders. We've seen interest rates on those same-day payday loans surpass 500% and 600%. That's unforgivable, that they would take advantage. We also see those payday lending shops being transplanted. They have transplanted traditional financial institutes like banks and credit unions, and done so in marginalized areas, in areas of low income. So actually, they're moving into neighbourhoods with the sole intent to take advantage of those low-income folks and those who would require same-day payday loans.

I think again this is a worthwhile endeavour for us to put our effort into. It's indicative of the fact that a minority government has the ability to find compromise, and I look forward to supporting it on its way through committee and afterwards as well.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Bob Delaney: Speaker, this is pretty simple. If you want to see the abuses cleaned up in door-to-door sales, we've got to get this bill passed. If you want to see the abuses cleaned up in debt settlement agencies, we've got to get this bill passed. If phantom offers just make you ill in the real estate business, we've got to get this bill passed. If you want to see proper à la carte services in real estate, we've got to get this bill passed. I believe we've got to get this bill passed. We've got to get it to committee.

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The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Bill Walker: It's a pleasure to speak to the member from Essex. It was nice—actually I don't think anybody heckled him in here, which is the way it should be when a member is speaking. We showed our respect for that.

It doesn't surprise me that he was heckling his member earlier, because at the end of the day, I think he'll probably prop him up on what the speaker was saying anyway. It's kind of the track record we've seen here many times. We criticize and we find fault in many things across the aisle, but at the end of the day we know where that party is going to stand. Taras has done that a fair bit in this House—over the last year and a half, really.

On this, again I agree with him on some of these pieces. I think he certainly is supportive of the bill. He's looking for some of the spirit of intent things. From our side, what we're doing is what we normally do. We stand and try to actually put opposition to the party across the floor; that is our job. We're supposed to hold them to account when they're not doing a good job. We continue to try to do that, Mr. Speaker, and hopefully Taras is finding that. He's sitting fairly close to us, and hopefully he's seeing there is that principle of us standing there saying, "Look, this isn't right."

This is a bill that is a step in the right direction. Typical of many of the bills we've seen from the Liberals, it's a lot of window dressing; it's a lot of much ado about nothing, I think one of my colleagues said today, quoting Shakespeare. There's a lot of window

dressing that says, "We're going to solve the ills of the world," but there are a lot of things missing from these bills.

What we've said, and what our critic from Stormont-Dundas-South Glengarry has said in his briefing to us, is that it's not a bad bill; it's a step in the right direction, but there's an awful lot of work needed to get there. There needs to be more protection for those consumers so that we actually put back in the consumer confidence that has been decimated under eight and a half to nine years of Liberal management, or mismanagement, we might say, with all the boondoggles they've had.

I certainly am going to be supporting the bill with those amendments at committee. Hopefully they will listen, because often what the Liberals do is say, "We want to hear, we want to have a conversation, we want to listen to the people of Ontario," and then as soon as we offer it, they just turn around and say, "Yes, thanks for that, but we act like a majority."

So we hope this bill will get to committee. We are going to support it, but there needs to be significant changes, as there does with many. We'll certainly stand up on our principles on this bill, like we always do.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The member for Hamilton East-Stoney Creek.

Mr. Paul Miller: I'd like to just touch on one of the aspects of the bill that I'm familiar with. Years ago, my wife and I both had real estate licences. We saw so many changes in the real estate business over the years that were positive, in reference to consumer protection.

I can remember the days when you would list a house and you would take the word of the owner of the house that there had been no water damage or the house did not have urea formaldehyde in it or it didn't have some damage, and there was no way of proving that. Sometimes in those days, the buyer would come back at the real estate agency saying, "Well, you didn't tell me."

One of the things they brought in over the years was a declaration by the owner, which he had to sign, that there had been no water damage, and a good real estate agent would get them to do that so that any responsibility for hidden problems that might arise after the purchaser bought the property would come to bear on the former owner. That was a good thing.

Also, the declaration that real estate agents can do what's called double-ending: I could list your house, and I could also bring the buyer. You're kind of acting as an agent for the buyer and the seller, and it's called double-ending. They brought in a form that you had to make your seller and the purchaser aware that you were representing both parties, because you'd be negotiating from both sides. It makes it rather difficult on a real estate agent when they do that, because you're trying to get the best deal—your objective is for your vendor. You're supposed to get the best price for your listing property, and yet you're supposed to get the best price for the purchaser, too. You're kind of like in the middle of this situation, so it can become very touchy at times.

Sometimes the consumer will say, "Well, you're doing a better job for the vendor. You've got his interests at

heart." Then the vendor will say, "You're lowering the price to suit the purchaser, so you can just move the property." It was very touchy. So they brought in this declaration so that both parties knew that you were aware of the situation, and it was very beneficial.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Hon. Mario Sergio: As well, Speaker, I have enjoyed the comments by the member from Essex. He has given a good rendition of the content of the bill, and I have to say that we agree with the views he has expressed.

Bill 55 speaks about consumer protection—strengthening the bill itself—but I have to say, after I listened to most members in the House, that it seems that there is unanimous consent to approve this bill and send it forward.

We've had 12 hours of debate, Speaker. It doesn't happen too often that we have 12 hours of debate on a particular piece of legislation where we all agree and we still continue to debate it in the House. I think it's time that we move it forward. We compliment all the speakers who have made a contribution on this bill. We want to compliment the Minister of Consumer Services, who has introduced the bill, and with the unanimity of the House, I would say. We all agree. Let's move it on. Let's approve it for second reading. Let's send it to a committee and bring it back as a better bill. I'm sure our consumers will all be glad we did that.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I return to the member for Essex for his reply.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: I want to thank the minister for seniors and the members for Mississauga—Streetsville, Hamilton East-Stoney Creek and Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound—particularly the member from Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound, who rose to talk about, I guess, the demeanour in this House. Often, we find ourselves heckling each other. He is certainly one to hold the reins on that one.

But I'm surprised from the outset that he actually read this bill. It seems they have been against, really, every bill that has been proposed in this House other than their own. But from time to time, we see there's some consensus. Certainly on this bill, there is some consensus, as there was in committee the other day when the member and his party joined—

Interjection.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: Well, the member wasn't on that committee, but the members of the Liberals and PCs joined to eliminate the month of July from sitting in committee for the justice committee to get down to—

Interjection.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: We wanted to sit the entire summer. Unfortunately, they decided to take a break during July, which will again demean the work that this House needs to do. The member can sit on his laurels and say that they're doing the hard work, but they actually haven't. It has been lazy politics at every step of the way, which I don't think people appreciate out there.

They see that there are parties, specifically the New Democratic Party, that are doing their very best to

address the issues that consumers face each and every day. But unfortunately, we have those in this House who would rather play games and talk as much as they can, bang their fists on their desks and try to rest on the sanctimony of their party, yet accomplish—I would like to say that they have accomplished something, but they have accomplished zero.

This is one that I think we can accomplish some steps on for consumers out there that will add some protection. Again, I commend the minister for introducing these important reforms.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Mr. Norm Miller: It's my pleasure to have the opportunity this afternoon to speak to Bill 55, An Act to amend the Collection Agencies Act, the Consumer Protection Act, 2002 and the Real Estate and Business Brokers Act, 2002 and to make consequential amendments to other Acts.

We've had a number of people speak to this bill already. Certainly, I'll try to get to all portions if I have time, but I think I'll start with the part that I've heard the most about from constituents in Parry Sound—Muskoka. That is to do with schedule 2, the Consumer Protection Act, which really deals with door-to-door salesmen in large part.

For a number of years, I've been receiving complaints from constituents on this issue, mainly, it seems, to do with hot water heaters and rental agreements. I would just like to get on the record a couple of constituents who have written to me. I won't use their names because I don't have permission for that.

On January 5, 2012, a gentleman from Huntsville wrote to me: "In cases where one company, for example, when Reliance took over the hot water tank from (rental) Ontario Hydro, I would like to see them have to send out a letter to the customers explaining there are charges or any changes and give the customer the choice of continuing with them or not. Put it in plain English or French in a separate envelope making it very clear."

He wrote to me with some excellent suggestions. I then wrote to the current Minister of Consumer Services—and that was Margaret Best at the time, actually—and pointed out his concerns. In fact, I wrote, "Mr. [—] suggests that if a company is transferring a consumer contract to another company, the consumer should be sent a letter in advance that clearly explains the change in plain language, and sets out any charges the consumer will have to pay. He adds that the consumer should then be given the choice of continuing with the contract or cancelling it." He—again, avoiding his name—"informed my staff that, in his case, it would cost him more to buy the used tank from Reliance than it would to purchase a brand new tank. I understand he also objects to the contract cancellation fee."

1510

He suggested "all consumer contracts should be easier to understand—no fine print, for example"—a very practical suggestion.

Interestingly enough, Mr. Speaker, I had a concern come in just today. When I learned I was speaking to this, I knew I had many constituent concerns, so I contacted the office. Just today, someone contacted me in my Bracebridge constituency office. They did say it was fine to use their name.

Ms. Idena Hervieux called, and she purchased her home last fall, moved in December 2012. A door-to-door representative of National Home Services attended at her home in April 2013. He told her that Reliance no longer was offering the service. He told her other people on the street were changing to National. He asked if he could look at the hot water heater.

To make a long story short, he came in; she let him into the house. He looked at the hot water heater and told her it needed to be replaced. Whether it did or not, who knows? He asked for a voided cheque. The next minute, she's signed up with National.

She's received a bill despite giving a voided cheque—I assume she assumed it would be an automatic one—and now there are problems with it as well. There are exhaust fumes being emitted by the hot water tank—the hot water tank which who knows whether she even needed.

She tried to call the door-to-door salesman and there's no answer. She can't get in touch with him. This is one that just came in today, noting that it's very much a current topic of interest.

Another one I received way back in April 2011 that I wrote to the Ontario Energy Board about:

My constituent's "complaint is that the agreement he had with Hydro One was transferred to Reliance Home Comfort without his knowledge or consent. He was not aware of any terms in relation to the removal of the hot water tank and therefore feels the fee for removal of the tank is unjustified. Furthermore, he feels that consumers should be protected from this type of practice."

"His attempts to negotiate have resulted in the matter being turned over to collections."

He was a good customer. He writes that he never missed a bill in 30 years, never missed a payment in 30 years. He wasn't told about the change and now has received a threatening letter that could affect his credit rating—just to give you an idea, Mr. Speaker, that there are a number of people who have written to me on this issue, so it's obviously something that needs to be dealt with. This bill establishes a 20-day cooling-off period, so it will provide some protection. I think it does still need to go further.

I'd just like to point out that this is really a frustration for seniors. My own mother lives in Gravenhurst. In the home that she currently lives in, she went through the same thing, where she had a hot water tank and she didn't want it any further. She spent months and months and months trying to make contact with the company and trying to get something done to actually get this dealt with, and it was really frustrating for her. I'm sure there are lots of people, particularly seniors, who are the vulnerable ones.

We've had some other similar situations where seniors needed to be wary—lately, to do with carpet cleaning.

Locally, in the Muskoka area, there was a company going around knocking on the doors of folks and then claiming to be Len's Carpet Cleaning and claiming that it was time for them to have their carpet done.

Well, I know Len and Len's Carpet Cleaning very well. At our past business, he cleaned carpets for many years. He does a great job, very reputable. This fraudster was basically using Len's name, showing up at people's doors, and then not only was he doing that—I don't know whether he was even cleaning the carpets properly—but he would tell the senior or the homeowner that the fumes were bad and he needed to shut the door, and then it turned out that he was stealing things as well.

I happened to talk to my own mother, who lives in Gravenhurst. It turns out she let this person into her own home. I don't know how you deal with that, except perhaps through more education, which all of us can try to do.

I know many members will do seniors' days where they bring in various groups to help educate. I did one a couple of years ago at the Gravenhurst Seniors Centre and it was really well attended. I know Mr. Wilson has done them for years. I think the member for Simcoe North, Garfield Dunlop, has run those days as well, where they try to bring in the OPP and other groups to help educate. Because in the case of that, really, I think it is the police that need to deal with it.

Mr. Speaker, there are a couple of other parts to this bill. I've talked about the door-to-door sales part of it, that is, schedule 2. There's also a schedule 3, which is to deal with real estate business and brokers. It deals mainly with, I guess, phantom offers, where a real estate broker may be trying to jack the price up and get somebody to buy a place or make a higher offer, so they create phantom offers. This particular change would make it that "A registered brokerage acting for a seller is required to retain, for the period of time prescribed by the regulations under the act, copies of all written offers...." So he has to maintain the actual offer. And a person who makes an offer, makes a written offer, is able to be told how many offers have actually been made. That's to deal with that phantom offer part that's been going on, that has been a problem for real estate.

In closing, because I only have a minute and 30 seconds left, there is also a section to do with debt settlement. But we've had quite a bit of debate on this bill, and we have agreement of all three parties that it's moving in the right direction and agreement that it should go to committee. The only problem is that there are no committees this summer. I think that a lot of us would like to see committees. I know I've been involved with public accounts the last year and a half, looking into Ornge, and our committee would like to sit this summer to keep working toward a final report. But we are not able to, because the government has not made arrangements for all of our committees to be able to sit. It would be great if this bill, that there seems to be unanimous agreement in support of, could go to a committee this summer and have public hearings and move through the

process. But unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, we will end up essentially having a mini prorogation without proroguing this summer, in terms of committees, because we won't be able to sit. It's very unfortunate that we'll lose that time until we come back in September, and then hopefully things will get rolling again.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to speak on Bill 55.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Paul Miller: I'd like to thank the member from Parry Sound—Muskoka for his comments. One aspect that he touched on that I would like to touch on is the human factor, Speaker. You don't know what it's like—well, I'm sure you do know what it's like when an elderly person comes into your office and they're almost in tears because they can't get out of this contract and they've tried very hard to contact these people and they keep being ignored and ignored and ignored, to the point where they come to us with a need and our staff has the ability to phone them from our office and kind of indicate that their licence might in jeopardy if they don't start behaving properly. Lo and behold, within a week or so, they get a letter; and after a year and a half of trying to get out of a contract, they're out of a contract. So it's amazing how they will basically give the runaround to the general consumer but when push comes to shove and they come up against a political office or the government, all of a sudden their attitude changes and they finally get a memory and they finally remember the address of the person that's been trying to contact them and something is done about it. But that's unfortunate because not everybody knows that they have that avenue to come to the MPP or MP's office to rectify an ugly situation.

There's nothing worse than having—and the appreciation on the senior's face when they get out of this situation. You know, they've even come and dropped off some baked goods or a coffee to my staff for helping them, because they're so thankful for helping them out of a situation. It really is heartwarming because you know you've actually done something with your office to help an elderly person or someone in your community get out of a really distressing situation for them, because a lot of them, in my community, are struggling financially. Twenty per cent of the people in my community are living below the poverty level, and when they get locked into these kinds of contracts it's pretty scary stuff, so I'm glad we can rectify that for them.

1520

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments.

Mr. Bill Mauro: I'm pleased to have a couple of minutes to respond to the member from Parry Sound—Muskoka, and I thank him for his comments. I'm pleased as well to hear, I think very clearly, that both of the opposition parties are likely going to be supporting this particular piece of legislation that our government has introduced. I want to thank our government for bringing forward legislation that's very much focused on consum-

er protection. I want to thank our minister for doing exactly the same. It's had a significant amount of debate, and we look forward to the support from the members of both opposition parties.

This particular one is not the first piece of consumer protection legislation that we have introduced over the course of the last short period of time. We have introduced legislation on cellphone protection that's going to enhance protection for consumers in the province of Ontario. This particular bill deals with the door-to-door sales of water heaters, debt settlement services and a range of other issues, and I'm very happy to see that focus come forward.

I've had a chance to speak on this legislation previously. As I said then—and I'll say it now—it has indeed been a wonderful opportunity, through my staff, to help so many people in my riding of Thunder Bay—Atikokan who have been, quite frankly, taken advantage of and ripped off by many of these door-to-door retailers who have been, unfortunately, in the practice of conducting this type of operation for quite some time in the province of Ontario. It's a significant industry in the province. Unfortunately, there are a lot of bad players in it.

I think the part that is most disgusting for those of us who do the kind of work that we do and hear about these incidents through our constituency offices is that far too often, it is our seniors who are being taken advantage of the most.

I'll state once again, in my last few seconds here, that I'm happy to hear that both the Conservatives and the NDP—it sounds to me—are going to support our government's legislation for enhanced consumer protection, primarily for our seniors.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments.

Mr. Jim McDonell: It's always a pleasure to get up and respond to the comments made by the member from Parry Sound—Muskoka. We can see through the discussion that he has a lot of experience with the issues of constituents, in talking about the hot water incident. It highlights a situation in this province that's gone on for some time. Certainly, the bill is overdue for consumer protection in a number of areas, and we look forward to getting it to committee.

He also talked about the trouble with getting it to committee because the government has teamed up with their farm team from the NDP, and so far, as I understand, there will be no committees this summer. We did have issue with one in July, but we were looking for a number in August and we're not seeing that. So we're hoping that the third party will reconsider and vote with us to bring back committees for the summer, but I guess maybe it's part of the agreement over the budget.

We need to look at consumer protection, but part of consumer protection is protection of our pocketbook.

Most of the complaints that I get in my riding are about the inability to afford to live in Ontario anymore. A person on a fixed income came to my office just two weeks ago, showing me bills and asking what they could

do. Their pensions aren't going up; they're fixed. They have limited resources, but their hydro bills have gone up almost three times since this government has taken over, and they don't see any relief. They were quite frightened when I told him that the Auditor General said they're going to go up another 45%. There was certainly disbelief there; they couldn't believe that they could go up further.

But anything is possible with this government. As they spend and spend more, they need more revenue, and you can only borrow so much. The credit ratings are telling them they've had enough. We're going to see what's going to happen, but it's time to put the people first.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: I'm pleased to add my comments to those of the member from Parry Sound—Muskoka, who, I think, always offers candid and well-nuanced interpretations of the bills that come before us today, without the matter of hyper-partisanship. I think his demeanour is certainly respected in this House and I enjoy listening to him. He brings up a bunch of different points that I think need to be, again, fully worked out through the committee process, which we're hearing will eventually be.

What I have, I guess, some questions around is just the fact that we are talking about regulation in here of private industry, and that the majority of the narrative coming from the official opposition is simply that the free market and private industry will cure our economic woes; let's just let them do what they need to do. People can be forgiven who are tuning in today to hear some conflicting ideology, so I would like to hear some clarification as to, when do we regulate? When do we not? Where's the red tape you have to cut, or is this red tape being added on to these industries?

Be clear with the people out there. Be forthright and truthful with the matters that you're promoting and your proposals and policy initiatives, because, at this point, we don't know what you're about. We don't know what you're supporting and why you're supporting it. That makes you no better, really, than some of the other fence-sitting political parties that sit in this House. So, either you believe in the free market or you don't. I don't know, again, where that ideology wavers here. We always used to be able to be confident and respect the fact that those on the right subscribe to that ideology. Now, I don't know anymore.

But I welcome that they're willing to look at this initiative. I welcome that they're taking it seriously, because I don't see that they have on any other measures that have come before this House.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That concludes our time for questions and comments. I am going to return to the member for Parry Sound—Muskoka for his reply.

Mr. Norm Miller: I'm pleased to reply to and thank the member from Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, the other Miller; the member from Thunder Bay—Atikokan; the

member from Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry; and the member from Essex.

The member from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek talked about the human factor. That is true. If you talk to your constituents, particularly seniors, it really is frustrating. It really is worrisome for them when they're trying to get out of one of these contracts and they can't do it. It really weighs on them. I saw that with my own mother, when she was trying to get out of a hot water tank contract and was just having no success in doing it. I think a lot of people around the province have experienced that. So I think we need to make it easier to cancel these contracts.

The member from Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry talked about how electricity costs have gone up so much. I think for all MPPs, you'd have to have your head in the sand if you haven't heard that from your constituents.

The member from Essex wanted to know how we feel about free enterprise. Certainly, our party is very much pro free enterprise and pro reducing red tape where it's just in the way of people running their business. I know, I met with golf course companies last week—the golf course caucus—and their number one concern was all the red tape involved in the golf course business that was taking time away from actually running their business but not necessarily accomplishing something. So I think, in this province, we do need to streamline the red tape, and allow people who are in business to be actually able to go and do their business to serve customers and make money. That's what makes the world go around, in the province of Ontario, so we need these businesses to be successful.

Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to have had the opportunity to speak this afternoon.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: I rise today to speak on the government's G55, Stronger Protection for Ontario Consumers Act. I thank all the speakers on this bill so far, and I am eager to add my thoughts and comments to theirs.

While most of the measures in this bill are extremely small steps, we look forward to strengthening this bill through committee work. One thing this bill accomplishes is that it sets out the framework for consumer advocacy, which the people of this province need badly. Too many Ontarians are faced with marketplace problems each year. Rising costs and stagnating wages leave more and more people in highly vulnerable positions.

We also are seeing greater numbers of people being denied access to government-funded services intended to support them. Ontario's consumers need an advocate who they can connect with easily, and more importantly, someone they can connect with in person.

1530

Let's take a look at this bill and how it's going to help Ontarians.

Schedule 1 amends the Collection Agencies Act to regulate debt settlement services. Debt settlement agencies act on behalf of the debtor in their arrangements or

negotiations with creditors, in return for some sort of fee. Some companies that provide debt settlement services offer to dramatically reduce a person's debt by negotiating with their creditors provided the consumer pays a hefty upfront fee. However, for some consumers in financial difficulty, this upfront fee can force them into more debt. Also, there is no guarantee that there will be a satisfactory outcome. The bill proposes to prohibit the payment of upfront fees before the services are provided and to limit the amount of the fees charged overall. Both of these limits would be set by regulation. It would also allow debtors to cancel their agreement without reason within a 10-day period after receiving a copy of the agreement. Finally, it would prohibit misleading sales practices and advertising. If companies fail to follow these rules, the new legislation would enable the revocation of their mandatory licence.

Again, my concern and my party's concern is that these measures do not take into account the most vulnerable in our society. Newcomers with literacy or language challenges will continue to struggle to know this service exists, let alone take advantage of the service, and those living with disabilities or who have poor access to transportation or communications like the Internet or the telephone will not be able to readily access these services.

I will agree that these baby steps are a start in the right direction, but once again, I wish this government could add greater protections for Ontario's consumers before they bring forward partially thought-out legislation. If they really intend to protect consumers, then why not take full measures to protect them? Real protections for vulnerable consumers would include enhancements and access to legal aid funding. The provincial government should conduct a review to initiate reforms that will ensure an appropriate share of legal aid gets apportioned to the support of vulnerable consumers facing consumer protection issues.

Consumer legal aid across Canada, such as education, information dissemination, summary legal advice, assistance in filling out Small Claims Court forms, representation in Small Claims Court on consumer/debtor issues, referral to government for enforcement and resolution, or mediation by phone, must be enhanced and supported directly and indirectly to enable consumers to engage in one-stop shopping on consumer issues. These are the kinds of supports that ensure that everyone, regardless of financial status, can feel the consumer protection under the law they deserve.

Looking to schedule 2 of this bill, I think it represents another good step. This schedule attempts to curb aggressive door-to-door water heater rental sales tactics by (1) doubling the existing 10-day cooling-off period to 20 days for water heaters, providing consumers more time to consider their decision, (2) banning delivery and installation of water heaters during the new 20-day cooling off period, and (3) allowing rules requiring companies to confirm sales by making scripted and recorded telephone calls to the consumer.

For me, personally, I am glad to see that this bill will also include language that demands that key contract terms are disclosed in clear, easy-to-understand language. The consumers of Ontario have been asking the government to take a stand on contract language for years. Whether it is credit card companies, cellphone contracts or, as we are discussing here, water heaters, the time has come to recognize that consumers are left vulnerable every time we prioritize the needs of companies over the needs of a family.

Finally, I hope we all agree that providing new customer protections when the rules are not followed, such as requiring the supplier to pay all cancellation fees when the 20-day cooling-off period is not observed, is a fair response.

One of the most important discussions we need to have about this bill is the necessity of funding to support awareness of services available. A greater awareness of services must be available to consumers locally, and government must be responsible for ensuring there is appropriate media publicity and better education. This can be achieved cost-effectively by allocating a share of federal consumer protection spending to fact-based consumer organizations to support consumers' rights days, promote media exposure of consumer issues or host public forums that reach many people. For example, more public legal education could be provided through mass media, including ethnic radio, TV and newspapers; workshops at community centres; easy-to-read plain language pamphlets and brochures in various languages; and posters with consumer rights and obligations placed in bus shelters, subways and other high-traffic public places.

We must also teach this consumer education in schools. All provinces of Canada should consider, encourage and adopt the teaching of consumer protection and awareness in schools, starting in grade 6, when children start to become consumers in their own right, and in higher grades in the areas of money management and the wise use of credit, with consultation, co-operation and determined support of those federal and provincial authorities constitutionally responsible for the proper functioning of Canada's financial services systems.

Lastly, we need stronger remedies for market failure and marketplace misconduct. Government must respond rapidly where the market fails to deliver needed consumer products and services. Where marketplace misconduct occurs, corrective action and remedial measures must be swiftly engaged; these must be fully compensatory and provide an adequate deterrent to further misconduct.

Mr. Speaker, there is much to say on this bill. For now, I'd like to ask every member of the Legislature to support this bill but agree to strengthen it in committee. The people of the province are facing enough challenges, and they are counting on us to make their lives fair. Amendments to this bill can help provide that fairness, and it is our duty to ensure that they get just that.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: I'm honoured to speak in response to the member from London—Fanshawe on Bill 55, which focuses on providing stronger protection for consumers in our communities.

I am very much in support of this bill. I can tell that some of the key things this bill is trying to strengthen, in terms of consumer protection, are things I have heard on a frequent basis in my community in Ottawa Centre. One example alone is door-to-door sales around heating equipment and water heaters, something we have heard on a regular basis, which my community office has helped constituents with on a fairly regular basis, unfortunately.

I think we know, and as has been mentioned in the House during debate on this bill, that what we find, of course, is vulnerable members of our community, especially seniors, being subjected to a lot of these illegal practices. By passing a bill like Bill 55, we are of course creating better protection for them.

I think it's incumbent on us to take these steps. I encourage all members, given the length of debate that has taken place on this bill, to pass this bill so it can move on to committee for further improvement and then passage, so that we can provide the necessary strong consumer protection needed in our communities; especially in mine, Ottawa Centre. Thank you very much, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The member for Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound.

Mr. Bill Walker: It's a pleasure to offer my comments in regard to my colleague from London—Fanshawe's remarks. I think she always comes here, first and foremost, thinking big time about the granddaughter she had just a little over a year ago when we first joined this House.

I think we agree on a lot of things. There needs to be greater awareness of the services and what you're allowed to do and not allowed to do. Talking about the cooling-off period, which is very applicable, I think it needs to be longer, because 20 days still isn't enough for some people in many cases, especially if there's a high-pressure salesman at the front door with our vulnerable seniors.

She supports consumer rights. Of course, how would I not do that? It's what the whole bill is about. She suggested some public forums and better public education so people are more aware of the types of scams and high pressure that's out there.

Her last comment that I picked up on was that there needs to be a lot more focus to address marketplace misconduct. This is one that I think is very appropriate in the time that we're now speaking, because in the last week we've talked about the gas plants and what the Liberal government has done to actually delete very serious information and information very pertinent to what's going on.

1540

Mr. Speaker, I believe you might have been one of the first people to raise that issue, so you'll pay very close

attention to this, I think. This is absolutely critical that we have that, and again it's part of the job of us as opposition—which you should be doing as well—holding that government to account, to make sure that they cannot do these things. That's a fundamental part of our democracy, that we have to be standing up and presenting that information, which truly belongs to the taxpayers.

I looked at this Consumer Protection Act a little bit, but we really have to get back to the fundamentals. That's a very principled thought process, that they've been able to get rid of documentation. Now we've had to call on the OPP for a criminal investigation. We're talking about this like this bill, which are a step in the right direction, but at the end of the day we need to step back and really look at the fundamentals of what we're doing. It's why we stand on conviction in regard to the budget. We cannot support a government that is so corrupt and has mismanaged our province for the last eight years. We continue to do that and will continue to do that.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Peter Tabuns): Questions and comments?

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: It's a pleasure to stand and address the member from London–Fanshawe and her comments. Absolutely—we have all said this many times this afternoon—we are supporting this bill; everyone in the House is. The question is to strengthen the bill when it gets to committee, and that's what I think we're all on board for doing.

This gives me a chance, though, to talk about an omission in the bill, a very glaring and serious omission when it comes to protecting consumers in the province of Ontario, and that is, there's nothing in here about payday lending companies. Many years ago, many times—and I will do it again—I tabled a bill to cap interest rates at 35%. Currently, if you go into a payday lender, you're going to be paying about 544% interest. That's called usury in most jurisdictions in the world but not here. In fact, it used to be called usury throughout Canada when the federal government was in charge of this file. Now that it's been downloaded to the provinces, the province of Ontario has decided to redefine usury and basically get rid of the concept entirely. This is equivalent to legitimizing theft, quite frankly—544% interest.

Now, to be fair, there were some slight revisions made because of the bill, because of the pressure, because of the good work of organizations like ACORN. It used to be 800% to 1,000%. Wow, we're getting better. But it could be, of course, what they have in other places, in particular Quebec, where interest rates are capped at 35%. Guess what? You don't have any payday lenders in Quebec because of that simple law. That's what we need here. That should have been in this bill, this omnibus bill for consumer protection, but it's glaringly absent. Certainly I would encourage the government to please add that in. The time is now. The time to do that is always the right time.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Peter Tabuns): Questions and comments?

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: Mr. Speaker, there has been more than 11 hours of discussion of this, so if we care that much about protecting our vulnerable citizens, we should move that to committee.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Peter Tabuns): Further debate?

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Peter Tabuns): I'm sorry. Reply.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: Thank you, Speaker; and you're doing a great job, yes. I just want to make sure.

I understand that the member opposite may feel that there's been enough discussion on the bill and wants to push it through, but this is democracy, and if we have a lot of time for debating this bill and if people want to get up and speak, I say the more power to them.

Interjections.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: That's right. And as they speak to this bill, if something else comes to their mind or they just want to make sure they drive that message home to this government about the things that need to be improved in this bill, then they need to listen and they need to understand that it's not just one person saying it. There's 36 members on this side and 18 members on this side, and it's very important. That's part of the process that we have here in the House, which I respect, really respect fully, that even though you might get tired of hearing something, sometimes that's when you should open—and I've said this before—should really listen, because once you turn off your opportunity to hear messages, that's not helping the bill.

I'm glad to see that all—I have heard everybody here in the House is going to be supporting the bill. But as we said, it needs a lot of strength, it needs a lot of muscle when it gets to committee. I hope when it gets to committee we're going to do that really hard work and actually enforce the words of the bill, which is protect consumers: G55, Stronger Protection for Ontario Consumers Act. I hope that's going to be the intent of the bill and I hope the outcome is going to be that when it gets to committee and we have good, strong debate on that.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Peter Tabuns): Further debate? The member for Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound.

Mr. Bill Walker: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That allowed me a few more minutes to prepare. It's my pleasure to speak to Bill 55 on behalf of the great constituents of Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound, An Act to amend the Collection Agencies Act, the Consumer Protection Act, 2002 and the Real Estate and Business Brokers Act, 2002 and to make consequential amendments to other Acts.

Speaker, of course we as a party want to protect consumers. That's an absolutely key tenet of why we would be here and it's why we write legislation—to do that. What we need to ensure with all legislation, as I've said in this House before, is to make it very clear and discernible and as simple for people to understand as possible, and that truly is helping to ensure that the

consumer is protected. That's why my colleague from Prince Edward-Hastings is actually our red tape critic, because he's trying to get rid of that bureaucracy and legislation that is just hand-tying our economy and the people of this great province. Speaker, it's very much that we want to be here; we need to ensure the confidence of consumers.

I've said a couple of times already today that this government, the Liberal government, over the last nine years has actually decimated the trust and the confidence of the consumer in Ontario. We're in the most dire financial circumstance of our history. They're facing an \$11-billion deficit; they're adding \$1.9 million per hour to our debt.

Interjection.

Mr. Bill Walker: There are 600,000 people out of work today. Thank you to the member from Orléans for helping me with that, because yes, those people are the ones that we're standing here for today. We need to do things to turn this province around so that those 600,000 people who don't have a job today have hope and have trust in the government, that they are doing the things to ensure that that will happen.

We need to ensure that there is that protection out there and that confidence. It's a double-edged sword, I believe: If consumers have confidence in their government, then they're going to go out and willingly buy those things; they're not going to have to succumb to peer pressure from a salesman who's at the door applying those pressure tactics to them. We'll talk about that a little bit further in my notes, as far as some of the things that this bill addresses.

I will give compliments to the Minister of Consumer Services for bringing this to the table. It is a step in the right direction. I think in many cases that it didn't go far enough. The hope from our party was that we would support it and take it to committee, but we just learned in the last week and a half that there won't be any committees—if you will, Speaker, another mini-prorogation. If I recall, you've spoken to that a couple of times in this House with a bit of disappointment as well, Speaker.

So now we're going to have a summer session where, again, there's nothing being debated, there's nothing moving forward in this government, and that's shameful, to be absolutely honest. Our job is to move this province forward, to ensure we're always doing our job to represent the people that send us here. It truly is an honour and a privilege to serve those people, and it bothers me to no end that we continually run into these roadblocks and yet in the public we hear all the window dressing of how wonderful they are and how closely guarding the province they are.

We talk a little bit in this bill about debt collection and debt settlement—again, a good step forward. They suggested that there have to be contracts in writing. Well, that only makes sense. Most deals and—back in the good old days, a handshake did prevail, but in our litigious society and the way things have become with this “me, me, me” society, we need more of that. We need people

to be able to know exactly what they're signing on to; put it in black and white and keep it as simple as absolutely possible. It's good that that's there.

But there's nothing in the bill about prohibition of upfront fees; there's nothing in there that really stops them from doing that. They say that they're solving the problem, Speaker. This is a typical thing that I found since I've been here with the Liberals. They tried out the 30-second sound bite that makes the world think that they're solving all the ills, but when you actually read the detail, they haven't even, most of the time, thought through what the impact is going to be.

In this case, I find it interesting that there's nothing in there that actually stops the collectors from harassing someone who actually has signed on to a plan. They've gone to a debt collection agency, in fact, and done the right thing, the honourable thing and said, “Yes, maybe I overstepped my bounds. Maybe things changed in my life, and I have the ability now to put a payment plan in place, and I will do that.” These people still continue to harass and do that. Why was that not in the bill? It's pretty fundamental, if you're truly sincere about helping the consumer. That's one that I have a concern about.

We need to ensure that that debt settlement is not lost. Again, I'm going to reiterate a number of times in my 35 minutes that I get to speak here today that there should be those types of provisions put into the bill to ensure that we truly are protecting the consumer.

Schedule 2 goes on to talk about door-to-door sales; specifically, it's been referenced, water heaters and the aggressive water heater sales. A number of my colleagues have talked about and I certainly get written submissions from my constituents saying that they've had this type of harassment. At the end of the day, this water heater is almost more than their mortgage bill, almost more than their energy bill, but I don't think it quite got that high, in any case, yet.

1550

It doesn't, again, address anything in there to actually stop exploiting these vulnerable people. It's pressure, pressure, pressure, particularly on the people who don't have the wherewithal, probably, in many cases, to pay these exorbitant fees—and the challenges.

The lacking part for me, the biggest part, is that there was no recourse. If someone signs under duress because of one of these heavy-handed pressure sales tactics, they have no ability to go back and say, “Look, I didn't really understand what I was doing. I didn't have any time to think about this.” So there are a lot of things.

They put in a 20-day period now—if this bill gets passed; if there were committees, it might actually get passed—but at the end of the day, what about if you've already signed? What if you've already done the deal? There's no recourse to go back and mitigate that. I think, again, that's a very glaring piece that has been left out of this bill.

Tank return practices: Again, they have a \$100 fee already in there, and basically they don't even have to answer to you why they put the \$100 fee in.

Again, I don't want to get off topic too much, but it almost sounds like the Liberals and the gas plants: "Well, we did this. We deleted those emails. We purposely set up Gmail accounts. But we don't really need to answer to that, because we'll just trot out the House leader to say, 'But you guys were going to build these plants too. We've gone over this. Just sweep it away and let us get on with it. Let us keep running the way we have down these tracks.'"

Absolutely not. That is not going to happen while we're here, certainly, as our caucus, standing up and defending the rights of our constituents.

They did put in a 20-day period so that you can give it some thought and some consideration. But again, I have an 85-year-old mom who lives on her own at home—lots of experience, lots of wisdom; a wonderful, wonderful lady, obviously—but this type of thing, at her age, is starting to get to the point where she's not really picking up on all the innuendo that's put in them, all these little hidden clauses that are built into contracts. In her case, what she really needs is time to sit down and review that with someone else. So it's a good thing. Twenty days may still not be enough in many cases, so I think that could be certainly improved.

The government is willing to regulate frustrating cancellation procedures in other industries, but why not with the water heaters specifically? Again, if they truly thought this out and had a really solid piece of legislation, why would they not have put that in there to protect people in that case?

Real estate is schedule 3. Again, I think there are some good things in there. What I like to see is that they're actually suggesting that you have to put any of your offers in writing. I've bought a couple of houses in my short lifetime so far, and you always had that situation where someone came and there's another offer that's been put in.

I want to stand up for the realtors in Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound. I know a number of them, a large number of them, in my constituency and they're all very reputable people who are professional in every manner there is. But there are deals out there that we've all heard of, where there are unscrupulous people trying to drive up the price, and bidding wars, as we call them, and this will certainly somewhat negate that.

However, again, this bill didn't go far enough. It did not put in a full cost-disclosure provision. It needs to be the whole deal, so that, when you're buying the biggest purchase you're probably going to make in your lifetime, you have confidence that you know exactly what you're signing on to. You know we've talked about people getting mould in their homes because it was done in a hasty decision and a pressurized sales environment. We need to understand that that's not going to happen in the future.

It's a bill that, again, I think, is a step in the right direction. I think my colleague from Barrie—some people on the other side are calling it the gateway to northern Ontario; some are calling it northern Ontario.

I'm not certain where that came from. But anyway, he's a great representative for his constituents, and he shares all the time that much of what the Liberals are bringing out is window dressing. There's that 30-second clip, that 30-second sound bite, that sounds good if you just don't happen to read the rest of the article or you just take it and run.

That's what they're doing. They're doing a lot of this spin, this 30-second "We're going to save the environment because of the Green Energy Act. We're going to close gas plants and we're going to delete emails, but just sweep that aside. It's only \$900 billion"—billion with a B. "It's not that consequential, really, because we got two more seats and we got another year or two to govern, and then we have a budget that's going to get passed with the help of the prop-up NDP."

It scares the daylights out of me that they're going to actually continue to do these types of things and this mismanagement, and they bring out a bill like this to distract us. What we should be talking about is how do we prop up a government—and we will not do that, as the PCs—who have mismanaged our economy, who have doubled the debt, who are going to have a \$411-billion deficit.

Our grandkids and children are never going to pay off this debt if we don't soon turn it around. Those pages in front of you are going to suffer more than anyone else, because they don't even have the hope to turn this thing around unless somebody steps up at some point.

Getting back to the bill, I think it's a step in the right direction. I think, again, it's a lot of window dressing without a lot of thought and detail that has been built into it. We generally would be supportive of sending it to committee. But as I've shared with you already in the House today, Speaker, my understanding is that there aren't going to be any committees this summer. It's going to be a mini-prorogation. The Liberals, as we all know, prorogued the House a number of months ago, of which the NDP are supportive, because they're giving them another shot at this by passing the budget.

We are going to stand on principle. We are truly here to say, "You know what? Enough is enough. We're going down the wrong track. You've put our province in dire financial straits. We need to do something to turn this around." We're going to stand on principle. We will not support the budget. We will move this to committee; it'll never go anywhere. It's like a lot of the things the Liberals do; it's just window dressing.

Speaker, thank you for the opportunity to share my thoughts.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Ms. Catherine Fife: It's a pleasure to stand up, actually, and talk about consumer protection in the province of Ontario. It's always interesting to hear the Conservative perspective, because they had an opportunity, actually, to make the budget better and chose not to. Yet every time you stand up and you say, "You know what? We just need to go to an election," I think that you're

ignoring the fact of the matter. The reality of the province of Ontario is that minority governments actually may be the future of this province.

So the people who live in this province and who pay taxes expect us to work. They expect us to show up and get something done. If that means working with the existing government and furthering the goals of the people of this province, then so be it.

On this particular bill—we've been very clear on this. It needs to be strengthened. That said, I want to actually share a story from Kitchener. It actually highlights the reason why this legislation is needed. Kitchener Utilities came into my office and they said the experience that they have been hearing from consumers door to door has been almost—it's been threatening for them. What they've heard is that from January 2012 to date, Kitchener Utilities has taken over 600 calls regarding door-to-door marketers in Kitchener. Also during this time period, 241 consumers have switched to another rental heater provider because they have been duped. This happens. The real-life experiences of Ontarians are that the marketers are getting more professional and more polished, so they need to be protected. Legislation is needed on this front.

We look forward, actually, to it getting to committee so we can actually strengthen it. We look forward to that work because it's actually in the interest of the people of this province. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mrs. Laura Albanese: I would like to point out that we've had more than 12 hours of debate now on Bill 55. I appreciate all the members' comments, but at the same time I believe all three parties are in agreement, and we should be sending this to committee. Let's send it to committee.

What the member from Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound said about the committees meeting this summer is not completely correct. The House leaders are still talking. The justice policy committee will be meeting every week, every Tuesday, in June and August. There are committees meeting. So let's send this bill to committee. Let's hear the voice of the people of Ontario through public hearings.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Rod Jackson: It's a pleasure to rise and speak to the member from Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound's comments. His yellow-lined papers are always an interesting addition to the process here. We're speaking to the Consumer Protection Act. Certainly, it's something that's of great consequence and great interest to all of us who sit in here who have all our constituents that come to our offices and have concerns about whether it's water heaters or just aggressive salespeople.

In fact, in Barrie, an extreme case: One woman actually was murdered by an aggressive salesperson several years ago. I know it's an extreme case and probably over-illustrates the point, but the fact remains that there needs

to be some parameters set around what happens when we're not protected entirely with the Consumer Protection Act. We all have stories about being approached in our driveways or at our front doors by aggressive salespeople with the water heaters and selling electricity—one-price electricity. We all, I think, in this House, because of the constant stream of complaints we get from our constituents, know that they are scams or they're not appropriate and many times, actually, rude. We know better, but it's because of where we are and where we sit and the types of business that we're in. But there are a lot of people out there, seniors and those who are more vulnerable, who don't understand that. So this act kind of starts us down the path of understanding that there are people out there who need to be somewhat regulated and given some parameters on how they can behave and act. I think any decent industry and anything that protects consumers from being taken advantage of is welcome.

But there is a line; there is buyer beware. I think this bill actually needs to go a little bit further in some cases.

1600

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: I listened also to the member from Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, and the member from Barrie just now with questions and comments.

Yes, it's absolutely true that there are going to be salespersons coming to your door who are aggressive, who are pushy, but there are also lots of salespeople who come to your door who are very friendly and they're very informative, but you can still feel that pressure, if there are vulnerable people behind the door like seniors. So they have a nice, friendly face, they're very warm, they explain things to you, but a senior still has that difficult time understanding what they're actually getting into when they sign on that dotted-line contract. That's where that extra extension, where people have that time to be thoughtful of what they've signed and what they're actually purchasing—and as he mentioned, his mother is elderly and she might need time to call her relatives, her sons and daughters. We know today everybody is busy; you may not get a hold of them within that two-day period. So that extra extension is good so that they can have that consultation with their family members. It's a good thing. I'm glad to hear the Conservatives talking about protection of consumers, because many times in this House when there are bills with good initiatives, they have voted them down without wanting to send them to committee and maybe make them better, even though they may not agree with them. That's okay; that's their prerogative, and we respect that.

I'm just glad to see that this is something that everybody here in the House is supporting and that we all agree that we do need, in this day and age, better consumer protection. There are so many products out there. Electronically, it's like going through a web, trying to find your way through the instruction book, let alone a sales contract, when you're dealing with electronics or any kind of services that come to your door.

I'll glad to see that the Conservatives are in support of that, and I look forward to when it does get discussed further.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I'll now return to the member for Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound for his reply.

Mr. Bill Walker: It's great to hear some feedback from my colleagues.

The member from Kitchener-Waterloo: I do find it a little bit rich, though, that she's talking about us not wanting to make things better. I think there's a little bit of opportunism going on over there. At the end of the day, they call the government corrupt every morning in question period, and we know they're going to prop them up. So you can't have it both ways; you just can't do that. If you truly want to protect the consumer, you should really stand up for the consumer and your voter.

The York South-Weston member: I'm glad there was some clarity there that there is still discussion going on about committees. It would be really nice to know that the government House leader from the Liberals and the government House leader from the NDP are going to actually work to keep things moving, because I know our House leader, the very experienced Jim Wilson, has done a great job. He's there every day trying to make this place work and trying to ensure that we can continue to move forward on behalf of the people of Ontario. So I'm glad to hear that. I'll believe it when I see it, because I think we've heard this coalition talk before, and we'll see where that goes.

The member from Barrie: I think what he really brought to the table was that he talked about the consequences that consumers will suffer. That's what really should be here, but I think we need to take it on a bigger perspective.

The London-Fanshawe member talked about how she's glad to see the PCs supporting—that we don't always want to work with them; we don't always want to listen; we don't always want to give input. I will challenge her on that. We stand here on principle every single day doing what we believe is right for the people who sent us here to Queen's Park. We will make sure that we do the right thing. We won't do it for our own self-serving needs, and we won't form sound bites just to look good on TV.

This is about consumer protection, and I wish one thing we could do in this bill is move it to a much broader mandate, so that it would actually protect the taxpayer from a Liberal-NDP coalition. Think about the Green Energy Act, which they both supported; it has taken away the democratic rights of the people. What about Ornge? What about the gas plants and the destroying of documents that's being supported if this government retains power? And what about doubling the debt? That's \$411 billion, and the kids of tomorrow are going to pay that debt. We will stand on principle and definitely want consumer protection from that perspective.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: I'm pleased to join the debate today on Bill 55, the Stronger Protection for Ontario Consumers Act. As has been stated before, maybe this should be changed to Stronger Protection for Ontario Taxpayers from this Current Government. That would probably be a better title for it.

It has a catchy, feel-good title, but it's very short on detail. The Ontario PC caucus is, in general, in support of this bill; however, it needs to get to committee so it can be fine-tuned in order to better protect consumers.

This bill is just one of a long list that this government has brought forward to deflect attention from their scandal-plagued administration. They try to do anything to avoid accountability and deflect blame. They don't want the people in Perth-Wellington, and indeed all of Ontario, to know about Ornge, eHealth, gas plant relocation costs and certainly their failed Green Energy Act. As the Information and Privacy Commissioner said last week, they don't want people to know about Liberal staff destroying evidence by deleting emails that are part of the public record. That is why the Ontario PC caucus asked for the OPP to investigate, and they are.

The Minister of Consumer Services has brought forward this bill to try to change the channel, as the saying goes. Her government wants people to forget about the failures of the McGuinty-Wynne government.

This government must ensure consumer protection legislation that creates a safe and trusting business environment. We have had many bills in this session, and in the last session as well, that are heavy on presentation but certainly light on detail. Bill 55 is just another example of this.

Speaker, a few weeks ago I spoke briefly to this bill in my response to my colleagues, and I am pleased to have the opportunity now to address the bill more fully. On May 1, I talked about something that happened in Perth-Wellington and how consumers are not being protected by this government. This issue has to do with selling solar panels. In fact, I have a constituent in my riding right now who is not hooked up to the grid after buying a solar panel a couple of years ago. I want to tell you a little bit about this story; this is what happens when you offer too much money for something.

At the time, they were offering 80-some cents for hydro from a solar panel. Of course, everybody jumped into this game. She was approached by a salesman who said he was in the solar panel business and that she was going to get 80 cents for her power. So she signed a contract with the man that day and gave him half the down payment—that's about \$50,000 that she gave him. The final payment was to come after construction, which was to be in September; the initial signing was in the spring.

Then she finds out there are no hydro lines to hook to the grid. There were property owners on both sides of her who hooked up to the grid at that time, but unfortunately, it didn't come down to her place. She called the salesman and said, "What am I going to do? You have sold me this solar panel, and I can't hook up to the grid." He said, "It was up to you to do this."

She ended up paying the rest of the cost of the panel, which put her over \$100,000, because that was in the contract. She has a structure beside her house doing nothing. And this company went out of business, because he had so many people jump into this thing, unfortunately.

She says, "It's partly my fault. I should have done my due diligence." But there she is, \$100,000 shorter. She had to borrow the money, and now she doesn't get any return on it. This is certainly a product of the government's Green Energy Act, and there are many people such as her who are suffering right now over that.

There's something that falls under the jurisdiction of the Minister of Consumer Services that she should be acting on—I have raised this issue before, and so far nothing has been done. That's what bothers me about this bill: What's going to be done if it ever does get to committee? It has to do with the recertification of grain dryers by the Technical Standards and Safety Authority, known as the TSSA. The Grain Farmers of Ontario have told me about their frustration with this issue. They know that the TSSA is not a timely and responsible organization.

1610

Speaker, I'm sure you know, coming from rural Ontario as you do, that when crops need to be harvested, they need to be harvested. They cannot wait for an inspector from Toronto to come to their farm and inspect the grain dryer if they have to make repairs to it. They certainly can't afford to pay the expense of inspection fees. This has been raised by myself and by other members of our party, and we have seen nothing done so far.

It can take up to three months to get an inspection done. This is very critical when you're trying to dry your crops, such as corn, because if the equipment has to come from the United States, then you have to bring that dryer in, or the equipment in. Unfortunately, then you have to get the inspector out there. Crops, when they're ready to harvest, are ready to harvest. That's the short and long of it. You have to get it done.

Unfortunately, farmers in my riding, and certainly in ridings all across rural Ontario, have to face this, and they're certainly not pleased. However, this minister, for some reason, is not getting anything done.

The member from Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry, our consumer services critic, has done an excellent job in monitoring this ministry and holding them to account. He has talked about how the government isn't really getting to the root of the problem with water heater service contracts.

Bill 55 proposes to double the cooling-off period for people who have signed water heater contracts. However, that may not have gotten to the root of the problem. If the purpose of Bill 55 is to protect the consumer from incurring high cancellation fees, the problem is the fees, rather than the cooling-off period.

As my colleague the member from Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry has told this House, Bill 55 is a treat-

ment, not a cure. We need to strengthen the ministry's enforcement tools and ensure consumers have recourse beyond the court system, because often the ones who get into trouble are the ones who can least afford a lawyer.

Last year, the Ministry of Consumer Services received 3,200 written complaints from consumers about unscrupulous business practices. There are many more consumers who do not complain. Many of them are seniors who are afraid to complain. They are often embarrassed that they were taken by a door-to-door salesman, and they do not want people to know.

Just last week I heard about a senior who was duped at the door. This lady is a widow; her husband took care of maintenance around the house. So when a salesman knocked on her door, she trusted him and felt that his claim that repair work was needed was true. The company claimed she needed insulation around the basement of her house, the type of black tar paper or vapour barrier that you sometimes see. It turned out that instead of using quality products, the company simply stuffed newspaper and other garbage around her foundation.

She called her daughter in tears, knowing that she had been duped. It was a very unfortunate situation, and she had no recourse, as she had already paid for the job.

People in my riding of Perth–Wellington are frightened. They're frightened of the high debt this province has piled up. They're afraid of hydro bills that keep increasing; they've doubled over the past number of years, since the Green Energy Act has been put in place, and they're suggesting—many consultants are suggesting—that these rates are going to increase and they're going to double in the next four or five years.

These are seniors on fixed incomes. They are people who maybe don't have the jobs they would like to have and can't afford some of these fees, and the high debt interest charges we're talking about—\$11 billion a year. This is just incredible. They're seeing a government that deals in scandal after scandal over the past nine years or so and wonder why they haven't helped them. They are the very people who put us here.

There is no meat in this bill. They use words like "aspire." Let's think of some things to do to help with this. It's very wishy-washy. We need to get this bill to committee, we need to strengthen it up, and we certainly are supportive of that. I do wish that when the government puts bills before the House, they would have something of substance in them, more than they have been known to do in the past.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: With respect to this bill, G55, Stronger Protection for Ontario Consumers Act, I think it's pretty clear that we should stand for the protection of consumers in Ontario and that bringing forward legislation that protects consumers is a good thing. There are certainly areas in this bill that need to be strengthened, but we have all heard that time and time again.

What I want to make clear, and I send this message clearly to the Conservative Party, is that when we are in

this House and we are working toward making this province a better place for people in Ontario, when we are making bills and passing laws to try to improve their lives—and this is a step in the right direction, much like one of my colleagues from the Conservative Party said; that's true—we have to keep in mind why we are here. We're here not for political gain. When we talk about "opportunism"—the word was thrown around by one of the Conservative Party members—opportunism is the idea of making a decision on whether to bring down the government when you are looking for power or not looking for power. If that's the reason why you're looking to topple a government, if you're looking to topple a government to see whether or not you can win more seats—the member from Elgin–Middlesex–London said, you know what? The NDP could have gained seats if they would have called an election.

That's not why we did this. We're not looking to gain or lose seats; we're looking to make this province a better place. So when we talk about opportunism, that's opportunism: If you make a decision based on whether you will gain power or not, that's opportunism. If you make a decision to make the province a better place, when you put the will and the needs of the people first, that's not opportunism. That's doing our job. That's being an elected representative. That's caring about the well-being of the people we represent. That's absolutely not opportunism. So I'd ask you to look again at the word "opportunism" and think about what it actually means and whose actions represent opportunism and whose actions represent caring for the people.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

M. Shafiq Qadri: J'ai le plaisir et, en même temps, la responsabilité de soutenir le projet de loi 55, Loi de 2013 renforçant la protection du consommateur ontarien.

I am, of course, privileged and honoured to follow my honourable colleague from Bramalea–Gore–Malton. Personally, I would have given him an A, but I also would commend him on his ongoing reprimand of—and the kind of internal dialogue between the PC Party and the NDP, I think, also serves the needs of Ontarians.

Speaker, this is a very important bill on a number of different fronts. We all have those individuals in our ridings, often elderly; there may be an English barrier, an educational barrier, even the naïveté, unfortunately, that exists still. I'll give you an example. One of my colleagues in this House was telling me earlier about how a high-pressure salesman appeared at her home and introduced himself and said, "Hi. I'm from the government of Ontario." Of course, she returned the same self-introduction, and I won't elaborate on the rest of that conversation. But these types of practices exist, particularly, for whatever reason, with regard to this water heater issue. As was cited earlier, this is one of the top 10 complaints, with reference to these sorts of high-pressure water heater sales.

That's why we have some specific codifications of, I guess, fraud protection: requiring plain-language dis-

closure of consumer rights and key terms; prohibiting delivery during the extended 20-day cooling-off period, probably something the gun industry might take heed of; providing stronger consumer remedies when these rules are breached—as very rightly pointed out by one of my Conservative colleagues, there must be opportunities for recourse; better enforcement from the ministry's point of view; opportunities for remedy and complaints resolution.

Ultimately, Speaker, it's about fulfilling our mandate as the government of Ontario in protecting consumers across the province.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The member for Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound.

Mr. Bill Walker: It's a pleasure, absolutely, to stand here and offer some remarks on the remarks given by my colleague from Perth–Wellington, our deputy critic for agriculture. I thought it was very appropriate that he brought a couple of things in there about consumer services that aren't in this and should be, because he's always defending the agriculture community.

He talked about the TSSA and the lack of services they actually provide in a very timely manner to our farmers. Those farmers are bringing in those crops that we need for our food industry. It's absolutely critical that that one has to be addressed. I would implore the minister to take that back under advisement and bring that in as quickly as they can.

1620

He brought another example of solar panels. What a travesty that that constituent, that lady from his riding, had to invest \$100,000 to get no return on it. That, to me, just exemplifies that they took this Green Energy Act and rammed it through for their own needs and their own purpose without good planning, because how could you ever permit that you didn't think far enough down the road to say to someone, "But you won't be able to hook to the grid for the power that we need"? You would have thought they'd have had that all planned out and this person wouldn't have had \$100,000 blowing in the wind, if I could.

He has commended, and appropriately so, our member from Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry, who is the critic for consumer services and who has done an exceptional job of making sure that he holds this government to account in his portfolio and on this bill, very similarly. He has been kind enough to say that it's a step in the right direction but it's very, very much in need of more revisions and amendments. It would have been nice for us to be able to know that we're taking it to committee and that they actually will accept the input at a committee level, because in a number of the other committees where we've been there trying to bring good feedback, that certainly hasn't happened.

The biggest thing, I think, I took away that the member from Perth–Wellington suggested is that there's no substance to this bill; again, a couple of nice, little baubles—that's what we seem to get a lot of the time—but no substantive meat on the bones. We need to make

sure the legislation is always protecting the consumer and acting in the best interest of the people of the province of Ontario. It's very similar to our vote on the budget bill. We're standing for the people of Ontario in the long term, not just playing games with it.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Ms. Catherine Fife: On this piece of legislation, Stronger Protection for Ontario Consumers Act, I think that we have to remember that there are some real stories in the province that all of us have taken responsibility for. Certainly, the consumers from Kitchener Utilities, in my riding of Kitchener-Waterloo, have come forward.

These are some of the issues. The legislation doesn't necessarily deal with them at this point in time. I think that if we were being honest, it's about a C minus, maybe a C, but we can make it better if we get it to committee. But customers are signing papers not knowing it's a water heater contract and are often being told lies in order for the marketer to obtain their signature. This is hugely concerning. It should concern all of us, actually, in this House.

Customers frequently call Kitchener Utilities after the marketer has already installed their water heater. When the utilities company gets the call, the customer then starts asking questions about process. That's where a piece of legislation should protect the consumer. That's why a waiting period actually is helpful, before anything gets installed, before any financial commitment has been made.

All of us are charged with coming to this House to try to get something done. Certainly, this piece of legislation will allow us to build in some supports for consumers. Also, though, in the broader perspective, it's part of the whole, right? When we look at what we got accomplished in this particular legislative session—I mean, at least New Democrats came to the table, put forward some priorities that people in this province identified to us, and we strengthened it through the Financial Accountability Office so that we don't have scandals that are coming forward from this government or from future governments, for instance; whereas the Conservatives came to this House and for two years have got absolutely nothing accomplished. So I can understand their frustration. What we are doing, though, is we're coming to the table and we're putting the priorities of people first each and every day.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): We return to the member for Perth-Wellington for his response.

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: Thank you, Speaker. I'm pleased to stand and respond, and I want to thank the members from Bramalea-Gore-Malton, Etobicoke North, Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound and Kitchener-Waterloo for their comments.

First of all, I want to make sure that this House knows that I am here for my constituents. That's why I'm here. That's why they put me here. To insinuate that I'm not is ridiculous.

The reason I'm here—it enforces my reason to be here—is to see what has happened in this last little while,

since I've been here. I see a government that, for some reason, can't find their way out of their problems without spending more money, throwing more money at them. Unfortunately, the members on my left here agree with doing stuff like that, and it's scaring people to death. Their hydro bills are going up. The cost of our debt is going up and, unfortunately, if this budget is passed, which it probably will be, the debt load on Ontarians is just going to be horrendous. I worry about that, Speaker.

This bill certainly should go to committee. I agree with that. But it is a wishy-washy bill and all it has done is try to deflect attention off this government and what the NDP are doing to support this government. That's all it is. I think the people of Ontario will see through that. More and more I get constituents in my riding wishing there was an election to put this government's misery to an end. However, it doesn't look like that's going to happen this time.

We have to certainly strengthen different parts of the bill, as has been mentioned by the previous speakers, and I certainly would support that.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Interjection.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: It's very hard when your colleagues interject, Speaker, very hard.

Hon. Liz Sandals: That seems to be a theme that's been running all afternoon.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: I think it's been a theme for all three parties, Minister, all three parties.

I'm pleased to rise to speak to G55, the Stronger Protection for Ontario Consumers Act, 2013, although as you'll note from my comments as we go through, Speaker, this act needs to be a lot stronger than it is originally proposed before us.

Most of the measures that have been brought forward are very small steps, and many of these steps absolutely have to be strengthened. Clearly, consumers are going to need more than what's been presented in this act today.

For all of us, for the people of Ontario, for the legislators here, there will be an opportunity in committee to call expert witness, to call consumers who have dealt with problematic vendors—in fact, in some cases, predatory vendors—and have them help us shape a law that will truly protect consumers.

There's no question that Ontario needs a strong consumer advocate. Like you, Speaker, I have dealt with constituents who have had to fight their way out of unfair contracts, who have had to push water heater salesmen out of their basements; people who have had to deal with debt collection agencies that have treated them in a way that could only kindly be described as showing a total lack of respect.

Millions of consumers in Canada face problems in the marketplace each year, and a significant number of them are vulnerable consumers: the elderly, people who are disabled and have vision or hearing problems or don't have the education to properly understand what are often extraordinarily complex contracts thrust in front of them,

people for whom English is not their first language. All of these consumers are vulnerable to being taken advantage of. They need an advocate that they can access conveniently, someone who can help them seek assistance when they have to deal with unfair sales and unfair contracts, someone who can assist them in person.

When you look at this bill, the first schedule amends the Collection Agencies Act to regulate debt settlement services. Debt settlement agencies act on behalf of the debtor in arrangements or negotiations with the debtor's creditors in return for some sort of fee. Some companies that provide debt settlement services offer to dramatically reduce a person's debt by negotiating with their creditors, provided that the consumer pays a hefty upfront fee. However, for some consumers in financial difficulty, this upfront fee can force them into more debt. Also, there's no guarantee that there will be satisfactory outcomes to those efforts.

The bill proposes to prohibit the payment of upfront fees before the services are provided and to limit the amount of fees charged overall. Both these limits would be set in regulation. It would also allow debtors to cancel their agreement without reason within a 10-day period after receiving a copy of the agreement. Finally, it would prohibit misleading sales practices and advertising. This legislation would allow the government of the day to yank licences on companies that didn't, in fact, follow these rules.

1630

Speaker, I've received a few phone calls and emails from constituents who are aware of this act. One constituent wrote to me saying that they didn't have an objection to what was written in the act, other than the fact that it was inadequate to deal with the problems they were dealing with. They had run into debt. They had done their best to get out of debt. They had settled a large part of the problems that they were facing, had been able to honourably pay off debts they had incurred except for two that were left. They were subjected to extraordinary harassment by debt collection agencies, harassment in the form of up to 50 phone calls in a night, calls to their employer—those sorts of harassments which they could not get relief from when they went to consumer services here in Ontario.

It's pretty clear to me that although this small step is a useful one, there needs to be a lot more done. My hope is that my colleagues who get to sit on this committee when this bill is considered will be able to speak with the other two parties and bring forward fairly straightforward, practical solutions to make life a lot better for those who are dealing with debt and debt collection agencies.

The second schedule in this bill attempts to curb aggressive door-to-door water heater rental sales tactics by doubling the existing 10-day cooling-off period to 20 days and banning delivery and installation of water heaters during the new 20-day cooling-off period.

I have to say that for the last few years, I have been in my riding, talking to my constituents about electricity and gas contract companies, ones that go out door to

door, try to sell these high-priced contracts to people, telling them that it will give them greater certainty and protection against rising prices in the marketplace. Speaker, you should be aware that the Auditor General of Ontario has said that with regard to the electricity prices provided by these private energy marketers, the prices are anywhere from 15% to 65% more than what constituents would pay, what people in Ontario would pay if they just stuck with their local distribution company. That's an extraordinary amount of money. The Electricity Distributors Association calculated that if all those contracts were nullified and people just dealt directly with their local hydro utility, they'd save about \$250 million a year. That's a huge amount of money; that is a huge amount of money.

A few years ago in this chamber, we debated legislation on dealing with those electricity marketers. Unfortunately, the government wasn't really willing to take them on and get rid of them, give people the ability to sign out of those contracts on a month's notice. That would have had a huge impact. It would have saved Ontarians hundreds of millions of dollars. It would have reduced the need for any sort of regulation or supervision, because it would have eliminated unfair players from market. The Report on Business magazine that came out just in the last few weeks had an article about Just Energy and all their affiliated companies, and how they were taking a beating in the stock market because people had figured out that this was not a good deal for consumers. They couldn't sell these gas and electricity contracts to people anymore as money-saving contracts, because they weren't. They were selling them as "insurance," so, "Your price won't go above a level that's much higher than what the market is charging right now."

A lot of those companies have diversified into water heater rentals. When you talk to constituents who have had people bull their way into their homes, represent themselves as utility representatives, as utility repair people or advocates or people who are sent out to make sure installations are properly set up, you realize that a lot more is needed than just a 20-day cooling-off period. There needs to be aggressive enforcement against predatory sales practices. Frankly, some of these companies either need to shape up or be put out of business, because the way they treat the public is nothing short of predatory. This expansion of a cooling-off period is not a bad idea. I don't see why we wouldn't vote for it. But in terms of what the public needs for protection, it is inadequate.

This bill should pass second reading, it should go to committee, but in committee it needs a big, big rewrite so that, in fact, we aren't taking baby steps to protect the public, but we're taking substantial steps to make sure that people aren't paying 15% to 60% more on their electricity bills, so that people aren't getting stuck with hot water heaters that they're paying bills on to one company while the other company that had already provided them with one is saying, "Look, you've got to give me a notice period of a year. This contract's got a way to run."

Those are the sorts of jams people are being caught in now. Those are the sorts of things that are going to have to be addressed at committee so this bill does protect consumers.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Hon. Liz Sandals: I'm please to respond to the remarks by the member from Toronto—Danforth. I, like him, have a constituency office where we often hear from constituents who have had encounters with door-to-door salesmen and have contracts that make no sense, and we end up trying to help them get out of the contracts that make no sense. I'm sure many of the MPPs here in this House, in all three parties, recognize that these door-to-door contracts also really don't match up to the promises that have been made by salesmen.

What I also hear is that I think all three parties support this bill, and given that we've now had 13 hours of debate on a bill that we all say we're going to support, what we really need to do now is get on with voting on Bill 55 and get it to committee, where any necessary adjustments can be made.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Jim McDonnell: I'm glad to rise to speak to the comments from the member for Toronto—Danforth, who put a lot of thought into what he said here. I don't agree with everything; I'm a little concerned with the idea that we should only have one incumbent. I think the record shows that competition is always a good thing. It drives down costs and tends to make people more efficient or they don't stay in the industry. But I do agree that there are some bad players out there, and the role of the Ministry of Consumer Services is to make sure contracts are such that they're fair and reflect what is needed in the industry, and to protect seniors and other vulnerable groups who aren't lawyers, aren't necessarily people with a lot of expertise in the field, who would need some help.

As well, when we're talking about contracts, I think the incumbents, whoever they may be—I think it has to be very clear in this bill, and we'll be looking at changes at committee to make sure there's an indication of just how much time is left on the contact and to ensure that when contracts are taken out, they're for a reasonable amount of time that allows the consumer and the provider a fair return. I've heard complaints that that's not always the case, so we want to make sure that's part of the bill.

As well, when you're talking about predatory sales tactics, we want to make sure that if there are problems in any industry—we're picking on the hot water industry, but I'm sure there are other industries that are affected as well, and we want to make sure they're covered off as well, because that's our job here. We want to ensure that we make it the best deal we can for the consumers, because we all pay for those in the end.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Ms. Sarah Campbell: I am pleased to rise and comment on the comments that were raised by my colleague

the member from Toronto—Danforth. He has raised some very salient points about energy retailers in the province of Ontario. I just wanted to also take this opportunity to thank him for his tireless advocacy.

Applause.

Ms. Sarah Campbell: Yes, he absolutely deserves some applause for that.

1640

He has devoted a great deal of his time making people aware of some of the tactics that are used, as well as pushing for the crackdown on some of these tactics that are used.

It's also very relevant to this bill because this bill, which is supposed to be stronger protection for consumers, really takes the regulations that were put in place to protect consumers against energy retailer contracts, and it's really using that model and some of the reform that was done a few years ago now—about 2010—by this government and using that model to protect people against water heater sales.

But the problem is, and the elephant is, that that model isn't necessarily working. We are still seeing that the top 10 complaints at the Ontario Energy Board are things regarding the misrepresentation of the contract; high cancellation fees, despite this government saying that they've cracked down on some of those things; even the misrepresentation of the agent who comes to the door by claiming that they are representing a publicly owned utility when, in fact, they're not.

So there's a lot more that needs to be done. I think that it's a major shortcoming for this legislation to model itself after existing legislation that really isn't doing what it's set out to do. So I look forward to making some of those reforms at committee.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Bob Delaney: One of my favourite door-to-door stories is the person who showed up to at my door to try to sell me an electricity contract and said: "The government is forcing us to do" whatever it is. I had just gotten home from work and I pulled out my legislative pass and I said: "Really? I am the government." He just turned tail and ran.

So the point of it is that if you want to get rid of those door-to-door abuses, this is the bill for you. If you want to do so many of the very valuable things that this bill does, we've got to get it passed. To get it passed, we've got to get it to committee. Let's get it to committee.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): We now return to the member for Toronto—Danforth for his two-minute reply.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: My thanks to the Minister of Education, the member from Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry, the member from Kenora—Rainy River and the member from Mississauga—Streetsville. It's interesting that almost all of us have had those problems dealing with energy marketing companies and now water heater rental outfits.

I have to agree with the member from Kenora—Rainy River that the model that's been used to deal with the

energy retailers has fallen far short of what is needed. It just is not adequate to the task. I know, in discussions with her, this is a big issue in the north; the retailers who have gone through and picked the bones pretty clean in the GTA have decided to fan out over the rest of the province. My guess is that you have vulnerable consumers as well.

Frankly, you don't have to have difficulty with English or with literacy to be taken advantage of by these people. I have constituents in my riding who I talk to—they've read an article that I put out about water heater rental companies or energy marketers—and said to me: "Really, I wish you'd been there last week." They were shocked that they'd been taken advantage of. They were shocked that they hadn't looked closely enough at the badge or the uniform, and listened closely enough to the words to realize that, in fact, they weren't dealing with a utility representative; they were dealing with a huckster.

With regard to the comments from the member from Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry, there are a lot of situations in which competition can be useful; in this area, it has failed completely. This is an area where the competitive private companies are charging a lot more than the regulated public utilities. I don't see any point in continuing that approach to selling energy.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Mr. Rod Jackson: It's a pleasure to rise in the House today and speak on Bill 55, a new consumer protection act. I believe this bill has good intentions and I think everyone in this House would agree that we must ensure that consumers can operate in a safe and fair business environment.

The importance of protecting consumers and ensuring best practices from our businesses has important ripple effects that stretch over our whole economy. If consumers are not secure in the knowledge that their rights are absolutely protected, consumption will go down and our economy will suffer. This is an economy that can't afford to suffer any longer. This government has already allowed it to skid off the rails somewhat. In the past 10 years of McGuinty-Wynne rule, Ontario's economy has suffered completely enough. In 10 years, our debt has doubled to \$273 billion. We spend \$11 billion a year servicing that debt. That's \$11 billion a year that could be going back into the pockets of Ontarians, paying for health care and paying for education, but instead it's being wasted to make up for years of Liberal mismanagement.

The Liberals have allowed the economy to stagnate and have overseen 75 straight months of an unemployment rate higher than the national average. To give them credit where credit is due, this Liberal government is awfully consistent in its inability to manage Ontario's economy. I'm not sure that they've improved at all since taking the reins in 2003. That's why I, myself, and the PC Party will always support protecting consumers while providing for an open and trustworthy consumer market. It builds confidence, increases consumption and improves our economy, which is in dire need of help.

Unfortunately, there are a few bad apples that muddy the market and prey on vulnerable consumers. We've all seen examples of this in all our different ridings. We absolutely believe that those businesses that take advantage of consumers must not be allowed to do so. Let's recognize that most businesses out there do a fantastic job. We are talking about a few bad apples, the odd percent here and there.

As this Liberal government should know by now, we always support ensuring more honesty in business and for consumers, just like we continue to be the only party that supports more honesty in government and for our taxpayers. That's why we certainly support the intentions of this bill. It does enact a few important protections for some vulnerable consumers and it goes part of the way to helping ensure a more fair marketplace. Unfortunately, it doesn't go all the way. It doesn't go the distance. We have a few suggestions for how to make this better and we hope this government will enact them.

One area where this government can improve consumer protections is the area of debt settlement and debt collection agencies. This bill does half the job. Certainly, some of the provisions do a lot of good. By putting all contracts in writing, consumers will be better protected in the event of an agency that wishes to take advantage of debtors.

The prohibition of charging upfront fees is another worthy change in the law. It helps ensure settlers will work with the debtors they are hired by, without being played by two sides.

We support these provisions, like much in this bill, actually. The problem is that it just doesn't go far enough. It needs to go that extra mile. This bill has taken on the entire tone of this Liberal government, which is the appearance of acting on problems without actually solving the problems. It's a lot of window dressing, as I have said many times in the past. It's taking a problem, recognizing it, and just not going the distance in making sure that we actually do what we need to do to solve it as a Legislature.

What about the provision that helps ensure collectors stop bothering debtors that have engaged a debt settlement agency? As of today, collectors will continue to call debtors at home, on cellphones and at offices in order to collect their debt, even when a debtor has employed a debt settlement agency to handle that affair for them. This partially defeats the purpose of working with a good settlement agency at all. Instead of giving debtors peace of mind that they'll be able to quickly and efficiently settle their debt, they continue to be called and bothered in these situations. It verges on harassment. This can only add stress to the consumer, and it can have a cascade effect on all Ontarians. The added stress can lead to health problems, family problems and even more economic problems at a micro and a macro level. Consumers should have the confidence that a settlement agency will do as it's supposed to do by handling all the calls from collectors.

This is just one area where this bill only goes halfway. We support the provisions that are there right now, but

there's no doubt that Ontarians deserve much better than half measures.

If we look at a recent Auditor General's report, we find lots of information about debt collection agencies. For example, the Auditor General found that 20 collection agencies averaged between 20 and 460 complaints annually between 2002 and 2009. In spite of hundreds of complaints, however, these agencies consistently had their licences renewed without the ministry even bothering to look into it. There's something where consumers need to be protected. That's something that should be in this bill. That's not what I call protecting consumers, and yet, even with the Auditor General calling attention to it, this legislation is devoid of content dealing with such issues.

1650

This government recently committed to establishing a Financial Accountability Office. If they love independent officers and oversight so much, why have they ignored so many of the Auditor General's suggestions for improving the lot of Ontarians all over? Instead, I would suggest that probably what we would hear is, "Thank you for the Financial Accountability Officer's submission," and moving on in the same direction they always do. That's about the effect that we've seen of all the different accountability offices.

We hope that this government will listen to our suggestions for strengthening this bill in committee, as there's no doubt this bill could be improved substantially.

Another section of this bill that is much discussed is the section of the bill that's dedicated to door-to-door sales. It continues to be the trend of duct-taping a leaky faucet and only doing half the job.

Our member and our critic the member for Stormont-Dundas-South Glengarry has made it clear that we do not support high-pressure, on-the-spot sales or any such tactics that exploit any vulnerable consumers. These kinds of door-to-door sales can put pressure on the consumers without giving them the proper time to inform themselves of all their options and alternatives. That's not to say that all door-to-door salespeople are like that; let's be clear.

This bill attempts to address part of the problem of door-to-door, high-pressure sales by introducing a cooling-off period of 20 days before the sellers install new water heaters. We believe this is not enough protection for the consumers. We need to go further. A vulnerable Ontarian who signs a contract at the door needs more time than just 20 days to take care of outstanding issues with their suppliers. This is another classic example of not going far enough and this government not going the distance. Obviously, we support the addition of such a cooling-off period. We would like to see it be longer, however, and that would serve only to protect consumers even more.

This bill also fails to address another problem that we've all been hearing from our constituents: It does not provide for recourse for consumers who continue to be taken advantage of while cancelling or returning water

heaters. Minor damages to water heaters can be assessed fees without any explanation to the consumer, and the process for returning tanks can be time-consuming and very stressful for them, as we've heard from different stories here today.

This process needs to be simplified. Instead of creating more regulations behind closed doors, this government should be bringing better legislation before this House that actually goes all the way in helping consumers in such situations. It's unfortunate that this government goes all-in on scandals from gas plants to eHealth and Ornge and others, yet only goes half the way when we actually are trying to provide real solutions for Ontarians.

The third and final part of this bill sees the Liberal government taking real action without much fuss or need for window dressing. It creates provisions to protect consumers who are looking to make one of the largest purchases anyone may ever make in their lifetime: the purchase of a new home. It's about time this government acted on the problems of phantom offers and the lack of transparency from a select few bad apples in sales. In my experience—and I think many others have had great experiences with real estate agents and even in car sales. But there are the few bad apples.

I'm glad to hear that a simple fix is being applied, without red tape. By ensuring that all offers made will be submitted in writing, consumers can feel safe in their knowledge that the bid was not being driven up artificially. This is the kind of fix that our government should be focusing on. If they spent half as much time actually doing good as they spend pretending to do good, perhaps they'd actually have the confidence of this House today.

Even so, the minister has neglected to include a provision for the full disclosure of costs. Every consumer has the right to know how much the contract with an agent will cost, and this is an important addition we'd like to see included in the future.

This is an omnibus bill which seeks to protect consumers and increase the confidence Ontarians can have across all markets. It's too bad that in trying to fix multiple issues, this government has merely provided a bill that goes halfway in fixing anything. This is a band-aid bill, which was clearly designed as a reaction. A few bad news stories make the media and this government attempts a quick fix. Ontarians deserve better. They deserve more from their government than reactions to bad news stories and scandals.

Ontarians deserve a forward-thinking government that has real vision for Ontario's future. We need a government that is proactive in improving this province, not reactive, not one playing defence all the time.

This bill certainly provides for some good changes to our current system that will improve consumer protection and confidence. However, it absolutely needs to go further, Speaker.

I sincerely hope this government opposite will take our suggestions that we've discussed here today into

serious consideration. I think, by the way, it is a good discussion we're having here today and of value, despite the want to push this through without added debate. The bill is halfway there. It's time to work together. It's time to get it right for Ontarians everywhere.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: I'm delighted to stand here today, on behalf of the residents of London-Fanshawe, and give my questions and comments, even though I'm getting some kind of eyes over the glasses on the other side of the room. But that's okay, because we're in a democracy and we can speak. As long as the debate time goes, I can speak.

What I'd like to say, though, is that I mentioned awareness in my earlier debate. We can make all the bills we want in this House, but if people aren't aware of those bills and don't know what their rights are, then they're not going to be effective. Part of that, as we mentioned, is having public consultations or public forums where people can come and actually talk about how your consumer rights are affected, what your rights are as a consumer and how these things have changed. I think that's a really important part of the piece of making this bill better, so that we don't just quietly slip that bill through. I know we're not doing it quietly, but things happen so fast every day that people may not be paying attention. When it's something this important—it touches everyday life; everybody will be a consumer, no matter who you, and at a very young age.

I mentioned before that we have electronics—you've got your iPads, you've got your cellphones. There are contracts for those things too, and they're very complicated. So education is a very important part of this bill. I hope that when we look at that in committee, we'll actually think about how to bring awareness so it can be a useful and effective bill for every consumer, whether they're a senior or whether they're a youth, and we'll all benefit from the bill we pass today.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions or comments?

Mr. Monte Kwinter: I'm pleased to rise and respond to the member from Barrie. I'm sure many of you know that 29 years ago, I was the Minister of Consumer and Commercial Relations, and we had issues similar to this.

It's interesting that everybody seems to agree that this legislation is good but not good enough. And they say we have to get on with it, but then nobody wants to get on with it. Let's send it to the committee. We've already had 13 hours of debate. Let's get it at second reading and let it get to the committee so we can deal with it. We're not going to be able to solve it in this Legislature. The only place we can get the results you want is at committee, and that's where it should be going.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Bill Walker: A pleasure to have an opportunity to finally speak in this House today, Speaker, and especially to the member from Barrie, my seatmate and

my colleague. I've very proud not only to sit beside him, but to work beside him and work with him as a member of our PC caucus. Every day, he brings his commitment to the people of Barrie whom he is sent here to represent, and he does an admirable job of that.

In his remarks, he certainly covered a lot of ground, and we've talked about that a fair bit in here today, so I'm going to focus a little bit on a couple of things. One of the things that I think really came through to me in his speech is the window dressing. It's trying to have the appearance of solving the world's ills. So we take a couple of complaints and go to the media with a 30-second sound bite and try to make it sound like we're solving all the ills.

But what really isn't there is a lot of ability for recourse. What's really going to prevent this from happening? What's going to give some person the opportunity for recourse when it does happen, so that people are truly protected, not just giving the appearance of it?

I think he used comments such as "a half-measures bill" and "a band-aid bill," and I think that's what the reality is. It certainly is one of those ones that we've trotted out. We haven't really done a fulsome job.

Why wouldn't they come across to our consumer critic, the member from Stormont-Dundas-South Glengarry? He's got a great lot of ideas that he could add to this bill, and we would have already had this and then could have got it into committee because we'd have covered those?

I think the other thing my colleague really pointed out was that it's our fundamental right and responsibility to represent the wishes of our constituents, and we're not going to rush any debate through just for the expediency of saying we want to get on with it. We'll never apologize for standing here and doing what's right; we'll stand every day and make sure that is.

He asked and talked a lot about debt and what we could have with health care and education if there weren't so many boondoggles and we had actual trust and confidence through consumer protection. And we need that, actually, for the Wynne government themselves. If there was more trust and protection, we wouldn't be debating things like gas plant scandals, eHealth and all the other ones that I've lived through since I've been here.

He's looking for honesty in business, honesty in government and honesty for taxpayers. Hopefully, this bill will help that. If we can get an assurance that there will be a committee, we're happy to get it there.

1700

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments? The member for Bramalea-Gore-Malton.

Interjections.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Thank you, everyone.

One of the areas in this bill that hasn't been talked about enough—and I think I'll just add my voice to that particular part—is the section that deals with debt settlement services.

Debt settlement services is a particularly interesting part of the bill, and I ask the Minister of Labour to tell me what he thinks about this. That portion of the bill talks about protection that we can give for consumers when it comes to debt settlement services.

The problem is that debt settlement services are services designed to actually help the consumer. A great deal of consumers are finding a benefit from having a debt settlement service that actually acts as a buffer between themselves and collection agencies. When we look at the legislation, one of the things that comes to my mind is, why is it that debt settlement services are covered, but the credit counsellors, who provide a very similar role, aren't covered in this?

If you look a bit deeper, credit counsellors are listed as a not-for-profit corporation or organization, but they're actually funded almost entirely by the banks. Banks are the principle beneficiaries of any loans, and collection agencies basically act as arms or wings of banks, because they try to collect the debt that people have received through their credit cards or through other loans.

So there's a bit of a question here. If we're putting all this pressure on debt settlement services, which ostensibly act as protection for consumers, and we're neglecting to address credit counsellors and disclosing in a transparent way the fact that they are actually funded by the banks, I'm questioning whether or not we have our priorities straight here. There are certainly some debt settlement services that aren't providing a good service and are not providing a benefit to the consumers, but a great deal of them are actually helping consumers settle their debts at a better rate than any other services out there. Let's keep that in mind when we make this bill.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That concludes our time for questions and comments for this round. I'll return to the member for Barrie for his two-minute reply.

Mr. Rod Jackson: I would like to thank the member from London—Fanshawe, the members from York Centre, Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound and Bramalea—Gore—Malton for their comments on my time.

The member from Bramalea—Gore—Malton did hit on something that is an issue, and it's something that I mentioned in my speech—and maybe that's where he picked it up from. Debt collection and how this bill addresses debt collection is actually something that needs a little bit more light shone on it.

I've had a number of different constituents come to me with debt problems, and they all want us to help them out. It is an issue. Even ones who are trying to resolve their debt issues legitimately and wholesomely have issues with debt collection. Sometimes, they're coming at them from all angles, to the point where it actually has an adverse effect on them. I actually had an experience where I moved homes and I had to get a new phone number, and I guess the person who had the number before me actually had some debt issues, so they kept calling and asking for Anne, and I kept telling them, "There is no Anne at this house. There is no Anne"—and

they wouldn't believe me. They thought I was trying to blow them off. They wouldn't stop for about a year. Finally, we had to threaten them with the police before they actually stopped calling my house. I can't imagine if I was Anne—you know, getting the calls at home, getting the calls at work, getting the visits. It got to the point where it was pretty much harassment.

We're also talking about the water heaters and the aggressive salespeople who come and, even for electricity distribution, take advantage of everybody. It's not just people who are seniors or vulnerable in our communities; it's our friends and neighbours who are getting taken advantage of by the promise of something better, and they aren't getting it. We know they can't get it. We know that's not how the system works, and it needs to be fixed. The same thing with real estate: Most real estate agents are very respectable people, but there are the odd ones out there who are predatory.

This bill goes the distance to make sure that won't happen. With the good things in it and the good things we can do in committee eventually, this bill will have some value.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Mr. Robert Bailey: Thank you very much for the opportunity to add my comments to Bill 55, An Act to amend the Collection Agencies Act, the Consumer Protection Act, 2002 and the Real Estate and Business Brokers Act, 2002 and to make consequential amendments to other Acts.

This particular bill has seen quite a lot of debate. We heard about that earlier, a few minutes ago. I'm sure that part of the reason for the vigorous debate on Bill 55 is because, as MPPs, we all hear from our constituents on a regular basis about many of the issues they hope to address. Of course, the amount of debate can probably also be ascribed to the omnibus nature of this act. It deals with a number of issues that likely should have been sectioned off and dealt with individually to ensure that they each received the level of input and consultation from this House that they deserve.

However, even with the ongoing commitment of the third party to support this government through thick and thin, the minister likely thought it best to try and expedite the handling of all the issues in this one act. That decision to group these together to see them through at once seems even more insightful in light of the increasingly treacherous footing that this government finds itself on. All that being said, I will be supporting Bill 55 whenever and if it is called for a vote.

There is a need for this government to do more to increase protection for consumers in the province of Ontario. Unfortunately, a lot of that legislation that this government has presented in the past has been geared more towards capturing a quick headline to benefit the government and less about addressing the root cause of many ongoing consumer complaints.

While this act will address aspects of high-pressure tactics used by businesses in dealing with consumers, it

does little to improve the consumer experience. That is why I am hopeful that by supporting this act and moving it forward to the committee stage, we, as a collective body of this Legislature, can set out to improve Bill 55 and make sure that it has some heft behind it. That way, we can ensure that it is effective and gives consumers in this province an increased sense of confidence in the marketplace, and with that increased sense of confidence, hopefully we will see to it that the common complaints that are associated with things like debt settlement agencies, door-to-door sales and real estate transactions are reduced, and consumer satisfaction increases.

My colleague the member from Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry talked a little about consumer confidence when he spoke about Bill 55, and I just want to reiterate those comments of his from the Hansard of April 30, 2013. The member from SDSG said, “When consumers are not secure in the knowledge that their rights are protected, consumption diminishes and the economy suffers.” This is a very important point and underlines why Bill 55 should undergo a thorough examination at committee.

Consumer confidence can and will play a dramatic impact on the overall health and well-being of our economy. When a province such as Ontario struggles to unbind itself from years of sluggish performance, building sound consumer confidence should be a top priority for this government.

Speaking from personal experience, the committee process was very helpful in developing the Ontario One Call Act. That was of course the act that the member from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek and myself introduced and was passed with unanimous support by this Legislature on June 14, 2012.

I know the Minister of Consumer Services is working diligently to make sure that all of Ontario One Call’s regulations are completed in short order and that this important system for increasing homeowner and worker protection is in place and that the Ontario One Call is fully operational as soon as possible.

Ontario One Call is an initiative that was developed by industry to address the increasingly complex network of underground infrastructure that is buried in our province. Likewise, since the Consumer Protection Act was originally passed by the previous Progressive Conservative government in 2002, this marketplace in Ontario has become increasingly complex. Long-standing industries have changed and evolved. Completely new industries that did not exist or were contemplated a decade ago have sprung up. As a result, the Consumer Protection Act needs to reflect those changes in the marketplace and adapt with them.

Bill 55, as it has been presented, will amend three separate acts in Ontario, and as I said before, addresses the issue of debt settlement, door-to-door sales with specific attention to the matter of the sale of water heaters and, finally, real estate transactions.

Debt settlement is an industry that has sprung up from the increased reliance on cheap credit that has been

commonplace in our modern society. Unfortunately, many people find the temptation of easy credit too much to resist and, before long, are unable to handle their growing debt burden, a situation not unlike that which this provincial government currently faces.

Companies offering services to help settle debt problems are becoming more commonplace, thanks in part to the increasing dependence on credit in our society. Unfortunately, as in all market segments, there are proprietors of debt settlement businesses that will take advantage of the vulnerable position that these customers find themselves in. Ideally, consumers would be able to avoid entering into agreements with these companies. However, when faced with the stress that growing debt can bring, consumers can and will make poor judgments.

1710

The Progressive Conservative critic of consumer services, my colleague from Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry, has made a number of recommendations to this government about how it can improve sections of Bill 55.

Specifically, as has been mentioned, the PC caucus believes that this act needs, among other things, to address the need for debt settling agencies that have signed agreements with clients to be the sole contact point and recipient of collection calls. This bill doesn’t do that, and it should. I hope that the minister will heed this recommendation and others put forward by the members of the opposition of both parties. Debt settlement will no doubt continue to be an industry that people will rely on for the foreseeable future. We need to ensure that it operates in the very best interests of all consumers.

In the same vein, the pressure tactics that have been used by some marketers doing door-to-door sales continue. We have dealt with this matter before, specifically as it relates to energy contracts. That, I might add, was a very busy part of my office over the last two or three years. It has finally tapered off but still forms a significant part. My office in Sarnia–Lambton still hears from people almost daily about contracts that they have signed with firms offering some variation on the theme of energy rate savings. Despite the efforts of the members of this Legislature to clear this up, there are still vulnerable Ontarians who are signing contracts at the door without taking proper care to understand fully what sort of agreement they’re entering into.

My understanding is that this act will double the cooling-off period for water heater rentals. In passing, that is a positive development. However, after only 20 days, if a consumer has yet to sort out any matters that may exist with their previous hot water tank supplier, they will still be subjected to severe penalties. Cancellation charges can run into the hundreds of dollars. In addition, companies can add hundreds of dollars to the bill through incidental charges. This sort of business practice is something that the ministry should be looking to address through this act.

It would be an improvement to this act if we could see a strengthening of the ministry’s enforcement tools so as

to dissuade organizations from engaging in what could possibly be viewed as deceptive business practices. To build on that idea, establishing some kind of avenue of recourse for consumers outside of the court system would certainly help alleviate a significant obstacle for many disgruntled consumers who simply can't afford the cost of a lawyer to fight on their behalf in the court system. I believe that this act could help to address that issue and build consumer confidence in an important economic sector.

Certainly in the GTA, it seems that the price of housing is climbing at a rate that is almost becoming unaffordable for many families. Even in my riding of Sarnia-Lambton, real estate agents are reporting a surge in activity, and they are often seeing multiple bids on houses that are driving up the final sale prices for these properties—okay if you're selling, not so good if you're buying.

While this competition is a good thing, it has been demonstrated that there are instances when unscrupulous agents or brokers are using phantom bids to drive up competing bids for prospective buyers. This government rightly should step in and take action to stamp out that practice. Of course, with this legislation, consumers will only know after the fact the number of actual bids. However, this information will still be valuable for consumers in the marketplace.

In conclusion, I will be supporting, as I said, with my caucus, Bill 55. It certainly isn't perfect in its current composition, but I do believe that by sending this to committee, we can tailor this bill to best address the prevailing issues surrounding debt settlement, door-to-door sales and real estate transactions. Done correctly, this could be a very positive initiative for the people of Ontario. The old adage of "Buyer beware" still applies. However, together we can certainly work to increase the consumer protection in Ontario. In doing so, hopefully we can help promote consumer confidence, which, as we all know, is a very important piece of our economic puzzle.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to speak to this bill today.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Mr. Speaker, I want to just add another item or another idea to consider when we're looking at this consumer protection piece of legislation. We've called for this, as the NDP, and I think this would assist us in bolstering consumer protection in the province: the idea of having the Ombudsman or a specific consumer services ombudsman who would be a central focal point. If there are issues that consumers are facing, if they are complaining about whatever it could be, from their cellphones to the unscrupulous activities of door-to-door salespeople, if there was a central place where people could call in and complain and that would be able to act as an advocate for consumers, that might provide a stronger mechanism to provide protection for consumers. So I ask everyone to consider either an

ombudsman for consumers, or expanding the reach of our current Ombudsman to allow his office to address concerns around consumer services.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Hon. Mario Sergio: I was listening to the member from Sarnia-Lambton. He has addressed several issues in Bill 55. They are all good points. I appreciate his rendition. They have been addressed before already.

We have had some 12 hours of debate already on this bill. I think it's time that we move it on and send it to committee and bring it back as a better bill. I'll let it go at that, and I hope we can move the bill on to a committee.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Jim McDonell: I always enjoy to get up and talk to the member from Sarnia-Lambton. He has been a big help to us since we got here, and of course is our whip on Mondays, so he keeps us in shape.

The discussions today have been centred around the need for this bill, and we certainly concur. We know there need to be some additions to it, and we've talked about a few of them. We talked about the debt settlement and making sure that all revenue is identified to the consumer so he knows just who the debt settler, the counsellor, would be working for. Is he working for the consumer or is he working for the creditor? That needs to be clear so that the consumer knows just what they're getting for their dollar. They want to make sure that they get the best deal possible.

Door-to-door sales: Again, I think everybody knows that there's an issue, and not only with hot water heaters but with many issues, and we need that addressed. The 20-day cooling-off period is a good step. I think there needs to be something to allow for the informed consumer who doesn't want to use the 20 days. They may have an issue and may want the heater placed sooner than later. Certainly, if you have a problem, it's not very handy to wait for 20 days to have a hot shower, so there are circumstances where that may be changed around. For most cases—if it's door-to-door sales—that's not the issue, but we need to allow for everything.

Real estate: This is a good point to bring up.

We're looking forward to getting it to committee, and we're somewhat concerned that for the summer right now we have no committee structure in place. We think it would be a shame to have to come back in the fall and have a huge backlog of bills. If the government is truly interested in getting some of these bills through, they'll agree with us and they'll strike the committee for the summer. We're hoping for at least four sessional days sometime. I know there's some disagreement about whether they shall be in one month or spread out, but that's a minor issue. We just need the committee sessions.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: I'm just going to take a few seconds to talk about the omission in the bill—again, a

glaring one—that there is nothing to protect payday lender customers. This is usury, by any stretch of the imagination, by any jurisdiction in the world. Through our payday lenders, we charge poor, hapless consumers over 500% interest—about 544% interest, to be exact. It used to be 800% to 1,000% interest, so I guess that's progress. But let's face it: That's usury. It was always considered usury in the federal laws, when it was at 60%. Then they downloaded the responsibility to the provinces. Why isn't that in this omnibus bill? I mean, real estate is in here. Debt collection services are in here. Why aren't payday lenders in here?

This is a bill that was put forward by our party. I put it forward many, many years ago—not just once, but twice, I think three times. It's going to come back again in the fall, whatever time—the third or fourth time.

But truly, in Quebec, where they only charge a maximum of 35%, there are no payday lenders. That's what we need in Ontario, because when you talk about hurting consumers, I can't imagine anything more egregious than being charged 544% interest for a small loan. That's really what they're charging. The Minister of Consumer Services knows this. She knows about the bill. It's been tabled many times. Why isn't it in this omnibus bill? I would love to see it strengthened. I challenge the government to do so.

Thanks be to ACORN, who really championed this and will continue to champion this issue.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That concludes the time for questions and comments. I return to the member for Sarnia–Lambton for his reply.

1720

Mr. Robert Bailey: So soon? Thank you Mr. Speaker; the time goes by so fast.

I'd like to thank the people that commented on my remarks: the member for Bramalea–Gore–Malton, the minister for seniors, the member from Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry and, of course, the member for Parkdale–High Park.

I, too, certainly agree with the payday loans. I would like to work toward that. If that was in here, I would certainly feel even stronger about this bill. I'm going to support it anyway, but I certainly agree. I know a number of people have passed through my office who have been taken advantage of—and those are the words, "taken advantage of"—by these payday loan—well, let's call them loan sharks; that's what they are. We can say that in here and we should be saying it outside of here. As far as I'm concerned, they shouldn't be in business. I've got no time for them. I don't know how they're able to survive in this province. We should be putting these guys out of business as far as I'm concerned.

All the other acts that are in here, I support those as well, what we're doing here. Like I say, if we had committees—that's what everybody keeps saying: "Let's get it out of here and get it to committee." But right now, as far as I understand, the committees haven't been struck for the summer. We need to do that. There are a

lot of bills that are out there that we've debated and that need to be improved, need to be passed. I think this is one of the more important ones, too, because of consumer protection but also, as the member for Parkdale–High Park said, here's a great improvement that the government could make to this; it would be great for their constituents, my constituents, the members of the third party as well. It would be doing the right thing. It would be doing consumers in this province a great benefit, and I would certainly support that.

Maybe we need an all-party initiative on that; all three parties go together and support that. I'd like to see what the arguments against these outfits are. Who would come in and defend the payday lenders? I don't know.

Anyway, thank you again, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to debate today and I look forward to the rest of the afternoon.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Mrs. Julia Munro: It's a pleasure to be able to rise today and make a few remarks about Bill 55. Others have mentioned, but I want to start with that phrase that comes to us back from ancient Roman days, and that of course is *caveat emptor*; it's buyer beware. It's always been there; it's always been an issue. The question today that we're looking at is trying to make sure that there's a balance between consumers and either those sellers or providers of service.

But there are a few things that I think at the outset people should keep in mind, and certainly "buyer beware" is one of them. So also, if it's too good to be true, it probably is. Those kinds of little items, then, would kind of give us a bit of a focus in looking at the need for the kind of legislation that we're looking at here today.

There are a couple of things that certainly work on behalf of the consumer, and that is the importance of clear, understandable and accessible rules. "Accessible" might surprise you, but try to find some of the fine print sometime. That certainly is a challenge to accessibility. It might be there but you may have difficulty accessing it.

The second is a mechanism, whether it's a court system or some other kind of judicial tribunal or opportunity. It has to be timely; it has to be affordable. If not, it simply decreases consumer confidence. Consumer confidence is one of those items that has to be at the front of the concern of any piece of legislation like this. With the information that is provided to the consumer, it follows then that there is some protection. An informed consumer is obviously a protected one.

I want to draw attention to that because there are many areas in our public life where people are talking more and more about the need for better financial literacy. I had occasion to have that brought home personally when I had a constituent come to see me a couple of years ago, whose job it was to write contracts for the purchase of cars. Her reason for coming to see me about this was the number of young people she encountered in her job who

didn't have a credit rating, who had declared bankruptcy, who had no idea of the consequences of their financial misdeeds. They were completely surprised at the fact that it would not be easy for them to secure a car.

There's a huge effort that's required. Certainly, the government has talked about having financial literacy within the school and other organizations. The Financial Planning Standards Council has offered advice. There are banks, there are so many places today that are busy trying to encourage people to recognize that it's their money and they have a responsibility in how it is spent.

The problem of that, the challenge of that is clear. When you look at the amount of personal debt on average that people are carrying in this province—this is aside from the debt they carry as taxpayers, as citizens of this province. This is their own personal financial debt.

This gets us around to the issue of having debt settlement and what are the options for people looking for that kind of help. The whole notion of consolidating debts and finding a package, then, that will make it possible for people to pay back is very important. It's also very important as part of the package of financial literacy. You mustn't be sucked in by not understanding what in fact you are agreeing to.

Even simple concepts like compound interest and what that does to your credit card and things like that are extremely important to understand. It's important for you to know who you're dealing with, that there's no conflict of interest between the adviser who is working for the lender or is working for the debtor. Obviously, it can't be both.

The question, then, of personal debt is a huge issue and particularly we recognize how important it is for young people. The stories about the contracts in the cellphone industry—we've just seen legislation that would provide some consumer protection in that field. But we certainly all know people who have horror stories of what they signed up for or what they thought they signed up for and how to get out of contracts and things like that. This is really, in this piece of legislation, the tip of a very large social iceberg.

The importance of bringing this forward in legislation certainly can't be underemphasized, but it must be seen as part of a bigger issue that we need to work on.

The other consumer issues that were raised in this bill is the question of the water heaters. People again have to remember caveat emptor—buyer beware. I think the issue around financial literacy becomes greater when you're talking about door-to-door salespeople because you may be crossing into different linguistic or ethnic or cultural lines where it's much harder for people to understand what the salesperson is or may be presenting.

The second issue that this bill raises is the question of real estate transactions. Each one of these deserves, obviously, its own special consideration, but I think the most important thing for us at this point is the fact that we do have a bill here that lays out, I would argue, the beginnings of a response to a very important issue. One need only look at a few of the many comments.

1730

The Auditor General's report talks about the question of the Collection Agencies Act and the manner in which people had complaints against them and no action taken. That, again, tends to diminish the confidence that consumers have, and if there's anything that a consumer ministry should do, it has to be to provide people with the tools and the confidence in the system, that they will in fact continue to be consumers with strong faith in the system.

One of the ways by which the government can do that is to ensure that we have timely committee hearings. People have said that they are in favour of this legislation. We know that there are issues that need to be raised in the committee process, where people can come forward to make a contribution to the efficacy of this piece of legislation, but we need a date and a time.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: I was chatting outside the members' lounge earlier with another member from the Conservative Party, and he was saying that there's a lot of debate—

Interjection.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: Yes, a very nice person.

He was saying how there has been a lot of debate on this bill and we were talking about how we're all in agreement that we want this bill to move forward and to go to committee, but we also agreed that if we still have something to say—he said, "You know what? I still wanted to say something on this bill and I was glad for the opportunity to talk on this bill." I know there's a member opposite there, as well as a lot of the members opposite, who feels that this bill has been debated to the ends of the earth and that it needs to go to committee and we need to get on with business. Just talking to that other member, he felt that yes, there have been a lot of things said—"But I had something to say," he said. So I was really grateful for that opportunity.

Again, this bill is a good bill. We're all in agreement. It's wonderful. It's nice to see, for a change, but we still have to have our experiences with our constituents being brought forward so everybody can understand what we are experiencing.

I've had many phone calls, as well, in my constituency office from constituents who can't afford that contract, and they're literally in tears. They feel trapped.

Interjection.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: Yes, it's an awful feeling. They feel trapped. They don't understand the contract. They give us a call. This is just going to be somewhat of a help for people and consumers in the long run, so I'm glad it's small steps that we're taking and I'm glad we're going to try to make this a better bill and add a little more muscle to it in the end. It's a step forward that we all agree with. I am looking forward to voting on this bill and sending it to committee when everybody is done their allotted time and feel that it's necessary.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments.

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: I am very concerned because I know that there are people at home, as we speak, who are being intimidated at their door and they are forced to sign a document or they are afraid of the person who is coming to the door. It's unfortunate that we keep repeating and talking about things that are not in the bill or about other bills that we wish to see here. I'll say to you that if you want the bill to improve, it's not by speaking here in the House; it does not help. Let's bring the bill to the committee.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Bill Walker: It's a pleasure to comment on the comments brought by my colleague from York-Simcoe, a sage guide. Particularly for us new, inexperienced members of the Legislature, she always brings well-balanced and thoughtful, reasoned debate to this House, and that's what we're all expected to do.

She introduced the term "caveat emptor," or buyer beware. I think that's very pertinent, because it is the responsibility of the person to be aware and to beware of those who might be trying to take advantage. However, at the end of the day, legislation sometimes is unfortunately required in today's society to offer that protection.

She offered a couple of other sage ideas: "If it's too good to be true, it probably is." If someone is asking you to sign a document today, the first time you've heard of it, typically, that should be a flag going off and bells and whistles should be screaming at you to say, "This is absolutely not something"—my mom just went through that with one of those telephone scams. Thank goodness, even at the age of 85, she still had the wherewithal to say, "No, I'm going to talk to my son about this," and she did. That was good for her.

What Ms. Munro brought up, again, is a couple of key points: Consumer confidence needs to be a key tenet of all legislation. This piece of legislation certainly has to meet that test. It has to be something that we're truly going to put in place and that gives consumers confidence.

I think it also needs to address the impact on the consumer, the stress that she raised, that happens when a consumer signs something or buys something and then has remorse, and the financial impact. One of my colleagues today said a lady in his riding spent \$100,000 on solar panels that couldn't be hooked up to the grid, with absolutely no ability—what a horrible feeling as a legislator, an MPP, when someone comes into your office and they've been hoodwinked by someone and you can't do anything. Hopefully, there will be more recourse in this bill by the time it's finished.

She referenced the social iceberg. This is just a very small piece of the need for the buyer to beware and, in fact, for the taxpayer to beware, with what we're seeing going on, with all the scandals around us. We need to take responsibility for our actions.

This bill needs to get to committee. I sure hope there are going to be committees so it can be debated and improved, and then there will be a solid piece of legislation to protect the consumers we're here to serve.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: It's interesting; in the course of this debate, I've had an email sent to me by a constituent who has had, just in the last day or so, a company come to the door and say that they were in the area inspecting water heaters. They just wanted to come in and take a look at the water heater in the basement. As my constituent wrote to me, they implied very strongly that they were there in an official capacity, possibly with the provincial government.

Speaker, a 20-day cooling-off period for this kind of operation is not adequate to deal with the problem. As my colleague from Kenora-Rainy River said earlier, the protections in place dealing with energy marketers, which is what this piece is modelled on, aren't adequate as written. Those same failing mechanisms are not going to help people deal with hot water heater rental salespeople, who are quite happy to go around spreading this false impression that they're official, that they're there just to inspect your water heater. No, they're there to try to bully you into, push you into, cajole you into signing a contract and, in some cases, putting you in a situation where you've got a contract with a new company and a contract with the old company, and you're going to get stuck with two rental bills.

My hope is that when this piece of legislation goes to committee—and I expect it will, given the comments that have been made—there will be substantial amendments made to make it extremely difficult for predatory companies to continue their operations, to make sure that in the future, people aren't going to have to wonder, "Who is that person running for my basement door, trying to get into my water heater?" They will have them stopped way before they get through the front door. That's our job: to stop them from getting to the front door in the first place.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That concludes our time for questions and comments. I return to the member for York-Simcoe for her reply.

Mrs. Julia Munro: Thank you to the member from London-Fanshawe, the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services, the members for Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound and Toronto-Danforth.

I would just come back to the committee issue, as raised by the minister, and say that's what we're waiting for: the opportunity to know that, in fact, the government is going to provide that opportunity in a timely way.

1740

The member for Toronto-Danforth's example just demonstrates how important it is that we have a broader public message in terms of scams and potential dangers to people. We know, for instance, that seniors are the target of so much in the way of fraud. It can't be overstated about letting people in, about giving information over the phone, these various safeguards that people need

to have right at the ready, so as soon as it happens, they don't have to think about it; they know. The answer is, "No, you cannot come in my house," or, "No, I don't give that information over the phone," to at least insulate people from the dangers of this kind of predatory behaviour.

I look forward to the opportunity for committee hearings because I think it will provide us with further opportunities to strengthen the bill.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Thank you. Further debate? I recognize the member for Cambridge.

Mr. Rob Leone: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You kind of said that in an ominous voice. I'm not sure if that's a prelude to what's to come, but I'm always pleased to rise in this Legislature to talk about legislation that has some significant impact on constituents in my riding.

Certainly a lot of members in this House have spoken to Bill 55, An Act to amend the Collection Agencies Act, the Consumer Protection Act, 2002 and the Real Estate and Business Brokers Act, 2002 and to make consequential amendments to other Acts.

As a number of members have already stated, I think this actually does have an effect on people in our ridings. Members have talked at length about some of the stories that have emerged with respect to consumer protection legislation and the need for it to protect from some of the things that are happening, particularly with some of the vulnerable communities of seniors and folks who perhaps don't speak English as a first language, and how they sometimes become convinced by overly ambitious people who come to the door and try and sell them a good or a service. I think a lot of people are looking for consumer protection legislation, and I'm pleased to have this debate here and see what happens when it goes to committee.

I note with interest, as I was reading the bill today for the second time, because I was going to speak to this bill at a previous moment—I think it was probably several weeks ago at the very least when it was called, and I haven't had the opportunity to add my voice to this debate, so I'm pleased to have that opportunity today. I notice that this bill has three schedules, and the three schedules pertain to three pieces of legislation that this bill seeks to amend.

The first is the Collection Agencies Act and, as a lot of people have discussed already, discusses some of the regulations that we want to impose on the debt settlement industry.

Schedule 2 talks about the Consumer Protection Act, which involves door-to-door sales, particularly with reference to water heaters. I'll tell you a story about that that occurred to me personally late last week, so very recently.

Schedule 3 talks about the Real Estate and Business Brokers Act and how this legislation seeks to amend that to improve consumer protection with respect to real estate transactions.

Then I think the bill seems somewhat incomplete, because if I were writing this bill, I would think that

consumer protection would also include protection to the hundreds of millions of dollars that have been wasted on politically motivated decisions to cancel some gas plants. So I would actually add a schedule 4 to this bill to protect the very taxpayers we certainly represent, and I think this bill should reflect the very essence of the reality that they have not been heard on the issue with respect to gas plants.

I note with interest that on the debt settlement portion of the bill—basically, I have two major comments with respect to that. One, as the member for Parkdale—High Park had mentioned earlier, is the lack of understanding and regulation with respect to payday lenders.

I had a constituent come to my office probably earlier in the spring. He talked to me about how he was in dire straits and actually was forced, for the very first time, to visit a payday lender. He talked about it in the sense that he felt very anxious. He kind of felt bad for going. He was humiliated to some degree for having to resort to some of these lending agencies. Then, when he finally realized how much the loan was going to cost him, he went through the roof. He was going through a little rough patch in terms of employment and retraining, and certainly he felt some difficulty with respect to the treatment he received at the payday lender.

I also note that the Canadian Association of Debt Assistance has certain issues with the bill. I'll read a June 5, 2013, press release; this just came out a couple of days ago: It says that the Canadian Association of Debt Assistance called on the government to amend Bill 55, the Stronger Protection for Ontario Consumers Act, to ensure that all companies providing debt negotiation and advice services are forced to play by the same rules.

What they mean is that some debt settlement agencies fall under the purview of this act, but those particularly related to financial institutions fall outside of the act and don't have any regulation, which means that they're going to benefit, to some degree, by having a status that is far different than others in the debt settlement industry. So with that in mind, there is a gap in the legislation that certainly the CADA feels needs to be rectified to put everybody on an equal and fair playing field.

In terms of the door-to-door sales with respect to water heaters, it was interesting because last Friday, I was at home when a door-to-door salesperson came to my door to talk about selling me a contract for a water heater. I was obviously quite amused because I knew we were debating this bill in the Legislature. The gentleman came up to me and said right away that so-and-so on the other street, whom I knew, came and said he was going to sign the water heater because his water heater was so rusted that it was going to leak and burst open and flood the basement, which, obviously, was going to cost thousands of dollars, if not more—tens of thousands of dollars—in insurance claims to fix the damage that that would cause.

He demanded, actually, to come in and see what my water heater looked like. I told him that he could not come in. He then demanded to see my bill—my water

heater bill—and I refused to do that. That's because, obviously, a lot of members in this Legislature say, "Do not sign a contract with a water heater." So make no mistake, Mr. Speaker, that I'm listening to my colleagues each and every time they have said that.

But the point I want to make is, I ended up walking to the named family that this gentleman had told me he had actually convinced to sign a contract. I talked to them about it because I wanted to say, "We're talking about this legislation. You have to always be a little wary about the kinds of things—when water heater contracts are being signed at the door." His response to me was, "What are you talking about? I did no such thing. I did not sign a contract for a water heater. I wasn't even home on Friday night."

This speaks to the kind of thing that we hear a lot from our constituents: that they are, in essence, being convinced through aggressive sales tactics at the door. When they're perhaps doing something else—they might be interrupted from cooking dinner; I was interrupted from spending some time with my children—they're in that moment. Sometimes you just want the person to go away, so you might say, "Okay. Look at my bill very quickly," and run off. But what I think has to happen is that we have to make sure that the proper regulations are in place.

I know that my colleague from Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry has proposed and has provided us with some details and some of the amendments that he wishes to propose once this bill goes to committee. I think that is one of the most important things that we should be talking about and debating in this Legislature.

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As the minister of community service has suggested earlier in her comments, I believe to the member from York—Simcoe, she stated that the best way to start helping the people who are suffering out there is to get this legislation passed.

I have two comments for that sentiment. This isn't a new phenomenon. This isn't a new problem. This problem has existed for a very long time. This government has been in power since 2003 and yet we are here in 2013 talking about consumer protection legislation that simply hasn't happened. That's the first thing. The second thing is, suppose this bill actually does get a second reading vote and we vote in favour. The fact is that we don't have committees to actually debate this bill, to study this bill and to improve this bill so that we can start improving the very lives that the minister was speaking of.

What I would suggest is, as many others have, particularly on the opposition, let's get these committees set up. Let's talk about how we can improve legislation like Bill 55 so that the people we serve do not have to suffer any longer. I think that's what any MPP in this Legislature wants.

I'm pleased to have had the opportunity to contribute to the debate.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Ms. Sarah Campbell: I'm pleased to rise and comment on the presentation that was made by the member from Cambridge. It's true; right? We've had this particular Liberal government that's been—well, they've been government since 2003. We're going on 10 years now. They have made some progress, as I mentioned in my earlier remarks, in the area of consumer protection. Unfortunately, the steps they took just didn't go far enough. We still see people who are falling through the cracks, who are prey to some of the door-to-door salespeople, especially with regard to energy retailers. I've seen in my office since I've been elected, since we've had those changes in 2010 and 2011 by this government—I still see a number of people who come, who have signed contracts and they thought they were given straight goods, they thought everything looked fine on its face and it turns out they've been subject to a really long contract, they're paying rates that are way out of whack with comparable rates that would be provided by their local utilities. Then, when they tried to cancel, they found that it's next to impossible to cancel. If they are able to cancel, they're paying exorbitant cancellation fees, and that's despite the steps this government has allegedly taken that are supposed to be helping protect consumers.

I want to reiterate the point I made earlier, which is that we really haven't come that far in the area of consumer protection. This Stronger Protection for Consumers Act really is not going to do anything to help people with water heaters any more than the other legislation has helped people when it comes to energy retailers. So we have a lot more to go.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Bob Delaney: In more than 14 hours of debate, enough insight has been provided. Let's get it to committee.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Jim McDonell: I'm proud to stand and comment on my seatmate here, who brought a lot of issues for discussion here. He talked about a personal issue and seeing first-hand the need for some of the legislation.

We talked about CADA, some of the ideas they have when it comes to debt settlement and making sure that the agreements are transparent and the customers know what they're signed up for.

I know there's been talk about hot water door-to-door, but we want to make sure that we also have two large incumbents that serve the market well. In their interest too, I think there needs to be transparency around some of the agreements and the cancellation fees that would be in this new contract.

It's interesting that we talk about the need to go to committee. I know this government has an issue with having committees formed last year. These committees were able to do a lot of good work, including the work on the power plant issue. I think the people of Ontario are

quite thankful that they were able to meet and bring these issues up.

Also, the cost of businesses was brought up and how they've seen some of the changes. I guess I'd like to highlight some of them. You know, we've seen hydro rates almost up three times, up another 45%. That's 450% over 10 years, and the next five—red tape has chased manufacturing out of this province. We have 300,000 manufacturing jobs we've lost; 550,000 people looking for work this morning.

It just speaks to this government's record. They've seen spending up almost 50%. The sad part is the revenue is almost the same amount, but they just have a huge deficit; they've driven up the debt. It's just a spend, spend, spend government.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

I'll return to the member for Cambridge, who has two minutes to reply.

Mr. Rob Leone: I'd like to thank the member, my seatmate from Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry, for his commentary; and so to the member for Mississauga—Streetsville, who suggested let's get this to committee. You're not going find any disagreement on this side of the House, if those committees actually existed to get it to. We still haven't seen that.

Also, to the member from Kenora—Rainy River, who I know is busy today preparing for a big event at Queen's

Park for her: She's going to have 100 grade 8 students flying from the farthest part of the province to Queen's Park tomorrow, where she's going to assemble some greeting cards for them. I notice that she's busy doing that. The fact that she took the time to sit and listen to my presentation today speaks volumes of her ability to multi-task, so I commend the member for Kenora—Rainy River for that.

Mr. Speaker, I think, as I have mentioned before, the reality is that consumer protection legislation is vital to a strong and vibrant democratic society. Certainly, that's something that we've all come here to represent and to promote as members of the Legislature. We want people to be happy with what they're getting, the services that are being provided to them, whatever that product or service is. They should have the full confidence that they're buying what they've asked for, and then, if they don't like it, that there are proper provisions to certainly get out of them. That's what this is about; it's about protecting consumers at the end of the day.

I'm pleased, once again, to have this opportunity to stand up on behalf of my constituents of Cambridge and North Dumfries, and I thank you for the opportunity.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): It being 6 of the clock, this House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 9 a.m.

The House adjourned at 1758.

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No. 53

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**Legislative Assembly
of Ontario**

Second Session, 40th Parliament

**Assemblée législative
de l'Ontario**

Deuxième session, 40^e législature

**Official Report
of Debates
(Hansard)**

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

Tuesday 11 June 2013

Mardi 11 juin 2013



Speaker
Honourable Dave Levac

Président
L'honorable Dave Levac

Clerk
Deborah Deller

Greffière
Deborah Deller

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Tuesday 11 June 2013

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Mardi 11 juin 2013

The House met at 0900.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Good morning.
Please join me in prayer.

Prayers.

ORDER OF BUSINESS

Hon. John Milloy: Mr. Speaker, I believe you will find that we have unanimous consent that the orders for second and third reading of the following private bills shall be called consecutively, and the questions and the motions for second and third reading of the bills put immediately without debate—the private bills are Bill Pr5, Bill Pr8, Bill Pr10, Bill Pr11, Bill Pr12, Bill Pr13, Bill Pr14 and Bill Pr17—and that Ms. Jaczek may move the motions for second and third reading of Bill Pr8 on behalf of Mr. McNeely and that Ms. Jaczek may move the motions for second and third reading of Bill Pr13 on behalf of Mr. Crack.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The government House leader is seeking unanimous consent to do the private bills. Do we agree? Agreed.

TERRA PAVING INC. ACT, 2013

Mr. Shurman moved second reading of the following bill: Bill Pr5, An Act to revive Terra Paving Inc.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): All those in favour of the motion? Agreed? Agreed.

Second reading agreed to.

TERRA PAVING INC. ACT, 2013

Mr. Shurman moved third reading of the following bill: Bill Pr5, An Act to revive Terra Paving Inc.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): All those in favour of the motion? Agreed? Agreed.

Be it resolved that the bill do now pass and be entitled as in the motion.

Third reading agreed to.

BEECHWOOD CEMETERY COMPANY ACT, 2013

Ms. Jaczek, on behalf of Mr. McNeely, moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill Pr8, An Act respecting The Beechwood Cemetery Company.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): All those in favour of the motion? Agreed? Agreed.

Second reading agreed to.

BEECHWOOD CEMETERY COMPANY ACT, 2013

Ms. Jaczek, on behalf of Mr. McNeely, moved third reading of the following bill:

Bill Pr8, An Act respecting The Beechwood Cemetery Company.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): All those agreed? Agreed? Carried.

Be it resolved that the bill do now pass and be entitled as in the motion.

Third reading agreed to.

MARSH & CO. HOSPITALITY REALTY INC. ACT, 2013

Ms. Jaczek moved second reading of the following bill: Bill Pr10, An Act to revive Marsh & Co. Hospitality Realty Inc.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Agreed? Agreed.
Second reading agreed to.

MARSH & CO. HOSPITALITY REALTY INC. ACT, 2013

Ms. Jaczek moved third reading of the following bill: Bill Pr10, An Act to revive Marsh & Co. Hospitality Realty Inc.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Shall the motion carry? Carried.

Be it resolved that the bill do now pass and be entitled as in the motion.

Third reading agreed to.

ROYAL CONSERVATORY OF MUSIC ACT, 2013

Mrs. Cansfield moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill Pr11, An Act respecting The Royal Conservatory of Music.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Shall the motion carry? Carried.

Second reading agreed to.

ROYAL CONSERVATORY OF MUSIC ACT, 2013

Mrs. Cansfield moved third reading of the following bill: Bill Pr11, An Act respecting The Royal Conservatory of Music.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Shall the motion carry? Carried.

Be it resolved that the bill do now pass and be entitled as in the motion.

Third reading agreed to.

UNIVERSAL HEALTH CONSULTING
INC. ACT, 2013

Mr. O'Toole moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill Pr12, An Act to revive Universal Health Consulting Inc.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Shall the motion carry? Carried.

Second reading agreed to.

UNIVERSAL HEALTH CONSULTING
INC. ACT, 2013

Mr. O'Toole moved third reading of the following bill:

Bill Pr12, An Act to revive Universal Health Consulting Inc.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Shall the motion carry? Carried.

Be it resolved that the bill do now pass and be entitled as in the motion.

Third reading agreed to.

CONGREGATION OF THE SISTERS
OF ST. JOSEPH IN CANADA ACT, 2013

Ms. Jaczek, on behalf of Mr. Crack, moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill Pr13, An Act to amalgamate The Sisters of St. Joseph of Hamilton, The Sisters of St. Joseph of the Diocese of London, in Ontario, The Sisters of St. Joseph of the Diocese of Peterborough in Ontario and Sisters of St. Joseph for the Diocese of Pembroke in Canada.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Shall the motion carry? Carried.

Second reading agreed to.

CONGREGATION OF THE SISTERS
OF ST. JOSEPH IN CANADA ACT, 2013

Ms. Jaczek, on behalf of Mr. Crack, moved third reading of the following bill:

Bill Pr13, An Act to amalgamate The Sisters of St. Joseph of Hamilton, The Sisters of St. Joseph of the Diocese of London, in Ontario, The Sisters of St. Joseph of the Diocese of Peterborough in Ontario and Sisters of St. Joseph for the Diocese of Pembroke in Canada.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Shall the motion carry? Carried.

Be it resolved that the bill do now pass and be entitled as in the motion.

Third reading agreed to.

ASPEN DRYWALL INC. ACT, 2013

Mr. O'Toole moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill Pr14, An Act to revive Aspen Drywall Inc.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Shall the motion carry? Carried.

Second reading agreed to.

ASPEN DRYWALL INC. ACT, 2013

Mr. O'Toole moved third reading of the following bill:

Bill Pr14, An Act to revive Aspen Drywall Inc.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Shall the motion carry? Carried.

Be it resolved that the bill do now pass and be entitled as in the motion.

Third reading agreed to.

TRIPLE "D" HOLDINGS LTD. ACT, 2013

Mr. Colle moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill Pr17, An Act to revive Triple "D" Holdings Ltd.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Shall the motion carry? Carried.

Second reading agreed to.

0910

TRIPLE "D" HOLDINGS LTD. ACT, 2013

Mr. Colle moved third reading of the following bill:

Bill Pr17, An Act to revive Triple "D" Holdings Ltd.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Shall the motion carry? Carried.

Be it resolved that the bill do now pass and be entitled as in the motion.

Third reading agreed to.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

STRONGER PROTECTION
FOR ONTARIO CONSUMERS ACT, 2013

LOI DE 2013 RENFORÇANT
LA PROTECTION
DU CONSOMMATEUR ONTARIEN

Resuming the debate adjourned on June 10, 2013, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 55, An Act to amend the Collection Agencies Act, the Consumer Protection Act, 2002 and the Real Estate and Business Brokers Act, 2002 and to make consequential amendments to other Acts / Projet de loi 55, Loi modifiant la Loi sur les agences de recouvrement, la Loi de 2002 sur la protection du consommateur et la Loi de 2002 sur le courtage commercial et immobilier et apportant des modifications corrélatives à d'autres lois.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Further debate.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: I'm happy to have this opportunity to speak to Bill 55. What does this bill do, just as a reminder to the folks? Well, it does a couple of things. I think the majority of people probably think it's not a bad idea. As my older brother Tony would say, it's better than a kick in the teeth. In that regard, it's a good bill. Some of the highlights include: protection from unfair cellular phone billing charges and unclear contracts; an extension of the cooling-off period for door-to-door water heater sales from 10 days to 20 days—and it makes it illegal to install these water heaters during this period; and there are restrictions on debt collection agency practices. Further, the bill requires real estate agents to retain records of written purchase offers.

All of these things are, in my view and in the view of many, I presume, good, little, small efforts. Could this government do a little more with respect to how we protect consumers? I think so. There are millions of consumers across Canada, and in Ontario in particular, who could use, in my view, someone who lobbies on their behalf. They could use a strong consumer advocate. We don't have these people. Some would argue, no, there would be another office created and we would have to pay them well to do that job. But when you realize that there are millions of consumers who are scammed each and every day, each and every month, each and every year, someone needs to be there to help them, to protect them in some way. While some argue that we, the elected members, are there to do that job, I say no; we are not the ones to do that. To the extent that we can be helpful, it's a good thing, and to the extent that some people come to our office and we can offer a little service to help them out, it's a good thing. But we can't do that job on a full-time basis. That's why you need a full-time consumer advocate to fight for people and to fight for vulnerable people. We've got probably 5% of the population who are literate—maybe more; I shouldn't say 5%, because I suspect we have a higher number of people who are literate.

Mr. Rob E. Milligan: We have the best education system in the world. Don't you listen to the government, Rosie?

Mr. Rosario Marchese: But being able to read and write doesn't mean that you're able to follow the ins and outs of contracts. Even professors sometimes don't look at contracts, and sometimes even lawyers don't do that, I dare say. So while we have a literate population, this is true, many are not consumer literate; they don't read contracts. We know, for example, that the government has received a huge number of complaints as they relate to water heaters. The number that I have seen is 3,200 written complaints and inquiries about door-to-door water heater sales in 2012. I remember the day when we used to have Consumers' Gas. Boy, did it work well. I don't remember people complaining when we had a public Consumers' Gas that offered services to folks.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): I'd ask the member to make his remarks through the Chair.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: I remember in the old days we had very few complaints. When we opened it up to so

many in the private sector to get involved in this field, we had one scam after another. It's unbelievable.

Mr. Mike Colle: Deregulation.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: When we deregulated, we had a whole lot of people entering this field. The more players you had in this field, the more scams you had to deal with. Each month or each year, as soon as the government caught up with the scam, no sooner did they do that than they bumped up to another scam. We can barely catch up with these people.

Mr. Mike Colle: They made a lot of money.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: There's a whole lot of pecunia in the field, to be sure.

We have a whole lot of problems that consumers are dealing with, and nobody's there to protect them. That's why I am a strong advocate of a consumer advocate, because I think consumers are vulnerable and consumers need some protection.

While, for example, we put some protections in place with respect to door-to-door water heater rental sales, including doubling the existing cooling-off period from 10 days to 20 days and banning delivery and installation of water heaters during the new 20-day cooling-off period—while that is helpful, I suspect that if people don't bother looking at their contracts within a 10-day period, they're not going to do that within a 20-day period. So even though we offer a greater amount of time for people to be able to look at their contracts, the majority of people, I think, will not do that. Even though we offer a little extra protection for homeowners, I'm not sure we're actually going to be able to deal with the scamming that goes on.

What some have suggested, and I believe this to be a fair comment, is that each and every time governments introduce a bill they have to spend the money to do some public awareness campaigns. Often, we pass a bill that is somewhat progressive and makes it a little better for consumers, but it doesn't mean that people automatically know what's going on. It doesn't mean that people follow the debates in this Legislature. It does not mean that somebody will read an article in one of the major dailies in Toronto, or some of the local ones outside of Toronto. It doesn't mean they will hear it on a radio station. The majority of people are simply too busy to know what is going on in government. And while a law is passed that makes it a little better for consumers, unless governments make a real, serious effort to let people know what we have done by way of law that protects them a little better, they're still going to be in the dark.

Even though some of these measures are a little more protective of consumers and give them a little better hand to be able to deal with scams and the like, it still isn't enough. I know that others, including the government, will say, "Yes, we could do more." If we could do more, we should be doing more.

This is why I want this bill to be sent to committee. We want people to comment on each and every one of these measures that we see put forth here in this bill, including schedule 3, which

—requires real estate brokers acting on behalf of a buyer to present an offer by a potential buyer that is in

writing; salespersons and brokers would also be prohibited from suggesting or claiming that a written offer exists when one does not exist;

—prohibits real estate professionals from indicating they have an offer unless they have that offer in writing; and

—requires brokers acting for the seller to retain copies of written offers received.

All of these things, I think, are useful, including now the negotiation of a fee and/or the commission. I think that is an interesting thing to include, but we hope that is fairer than what we have currently. I, quite frankly, don't know.

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: Every other province does it.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Because every other province does it, that doesn't necessarily mean it's a good thing. We might be making reforms on the basis of what everybody else is doing, but are they better? Or are we improving what everybody else is doing? It's just that sometimes, for me, it's not a question of copying what other people do on the basis that if we copy them, it will be the right thing to do, but rather, are we improving legislation based on what others are doing and based on what we're learning? I think that's what we should be doing.

So we're obviously going to take that to hearings. We're going to hear from the experts, and hopefully we'll improve it. Hopefully, we will see governments accommodating amendments as a way of making it stronger, because little measures are good, but little measures can become bigger measures that protect consumers in a way that we can be proud of. While some of these consumer things are good, we can do a whole lot better, including making Tarion a much better institution that protects consumers. At the moment, I believe they protect developers. I would have a lot more to say if I had 20 minutes instead of 10. But if we want to protect homeowners and condo owners, it's important to make sure that Tarion, the private agency that is supposed to protect consumers, actually does that. The way to do that is to make sure we change the composition of Tarion to make sure consumers are on the board and not—I still have two seconds. Why are you standing up?

0920

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): I was just coming over here.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: That's what I'm saying, Speaker. Thanks for your attention.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Questions and comments?

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: Good morning and thank you, Speaker. Again, I'm happy to speak about Bill 55. I'm very proud to have introduced this bill. It is about consumer protection, and I'm very glad to hear that the member from Trinity-Spadina described it as useful, and he sounds very supportive of it going forward. Yes, when we get it to committee, we'll work on it.

But I just want to say, Speaker, we've spent 15 hours debating this bill. At the risk of repeating myself and not

reiterating, I think of all the good reasons why we need to support this bill, all the good reasons why we need to stand up for Ontario consumers.

I think it's important that we recognize that this isn't just responding to complaints and calls; this is about increasing consumer confidence in the marketplace. When consumers are confident, that is helpful to jobs and the economy. That's what we're trying to do: yes, respond to the complaints we have had, whether they're on door-to-door sales of water heaters, dealing with some not-appropriate practices in the debt settlement sector or dealing with some practices of concern in the real estate sector, as well as modernizing the fee structure for real estate agents and brokers—yes, responding to the issues, but also being proactive. It's part of a larger suite of consumer protection initiatives going on in this province.

The member opposite talked about other issues he has. There are lots of consumer issues. I have introduced other legislation as well to put under the umbrella of what we call ontarioconsumer.ca.

I couldn't agree more that we need to be responsive to what we need in the province. I believe this legislation is helpful. We have had positive feedback so far today, and I encourage everyone to help us move this forward and get it to committee. I think there's a tremendous amount of consensus. So why not get this one to committee now so we can get on with it?

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further comments.

Mr. John O'Toole: I did listen to the member from Trinity-Spadina. I know that he means well. I think that he—but he did speak rather passionately about the term "change," that there needs to be changes. Well, it crossed my mind, on this last day of this portion of the sitting here at Queen's Park, that the change that should happen today is that the party that he's a member of should turn the tides on the McGuinty-Wynne government. The disgrace that has occurred here in this last session on the scandals, on Ornge, as well as the current one—

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: Point of order.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Point of order?

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: Speaker, I believe we were debating Bill 55.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): I might remind the member to tailor his remarks to be consistent with the bill.

Mr. John O'Toole: Thank you. It's clear you were a teacher at one time, because there's a bit of a lecture there.

In due respect, I am relating it back to the member's comments with respect to change. This afternoon, there's an opportunity to bring real change to Ontario and elect a government that will actually do something.

However, on the bill, it's mostly a feel-good bill. Minister MacCharles has worked hard on this, introducing the bill, which amends three statutes. She introduced it on April 18. It should go to committee to be improved, and I would be most interested in working on the part that's on

consumer protection with respect to the debt settlement issue. That's the area that I feel is the weakest and needs some strengthening and further plain-language legislation so that vulnerable consumers are being protected by clear disclosure requirements by the lender. I'm sure that will go to committee if it passes today.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further comments?

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: I spoke to this bill yesterday, and I'm glad to stand here today and speak to it again for the residents of London—Fanshawe—I'm always proud to represent my constituents.

The consumer bill is something that we certainly need; I heard the minister say that every other province has this legislation to protect consumers. So certainly it's long overdue. We have to make sure that we protect consumers. But the member from Trinity—Spadina had a wonderful thought: We don't just do it for the sake of doing it; we don't just follow the crowd. We have to make sure it's going to work for us and what we do is going to be improving the lives of the people of Ontario and the people of our ridings.

So I definitely agree that we should be supporting this bill. There are many situations—we read in the paper today that consumers, actually people in London, in this case, in Sunningdale, which is close to my riding, are building new homes, and unfortunately the contractor, the builder, the developer has closed his doors and they're stuck.

That kind of ties into how people feel when they enter into a contract and maybe don't understand all the ins and outs. You change your mind, and you're stuck with this water heater that you're going to be paying exorbitant amounts of money on for a time, well over what it's worth. So I like that 20-day cooling-off period once you sign a contract. At least there is some time there to consider what you've done and maybe get some advice from your family or friends about that.

I'm glad to see that this bill is going to be put forward. I understand that most of the Conservatives are going to support it, so that's good to see. I'd like to see that when it does get to committee we don't just, because other provinces have it—we need to make it the best we can here in Ontario, so that we make sure consumers are protected fully.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further comments?

Hon. Linda Jeffrey: Good morning. I want to speak in favour of Bill 55, and I want to keep this short, because there have been about 15 hours of debate. Certainly the Minister of Consumer Services did a nice synopsis of what we've been working on, and I think it's time to finish second reading and send it to committee so we can hear from the public about what measures we can do to strengthen this piece of legislation. I'm encouraging of Bill 55, I want stronger protections for Ontarians and I think we should get it on to committee.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The member for Trinity—Spadina has two minutes to respond.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: I agree with the two ministers that we should send it out to committee, absolutely, and I agree with the minister on this file, who says this will help with consumer confidence. I think it does. While it helps, how do we make sure that we build stronger consumer confidence? These are the comments I was making.

The fact that other provinces are doing this is good, and we're catching up. I think we should learn from what other provinces have done as a way of making our bills even stronger. That should be our job: How do we make it stronger? Not that we are duplicating what other people are doing so that we are catching up, but as we catch up, how do we make it better? This is the point for me.

We are dealing with millions of people—vulnerable citizens, low-income people, people with disabilities, people who have literacy skills—and those are a whole lot of people in our society who desperately need governments to support them. The way we build confidence in the system is to make sure we inform them of what governments are doing, and governments rarely do that. We rarely do that. We pass a bill and then we hope for the best; we hope that people know what we're doing.

The fact of the matter is, people don't know what we're doing around here; they don't have a clue. So we should spend a couple of dollars to tell them how we are protecting them as consumers and the measures that are in place to help them out and what it is that they could do to make this bill a little better. The way they make this bill better is to have a strong consumer advocate in place. A strong consumer advocate would genuinely represent them. We do that as best we can, but nobody could replace someone whose job it is to be a consumer advocate. That's the little investment that I recommend we make to protect consumers in Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further debate?

Ms. Laurie Scott: I'm pleased to rise to speak to Bill 55 this morning. I'm a little disappointed that the Liberals didn't want to take a rotation, but we'll continue to speak to Bill 55, An Act to amend the Collection Agencies Act, the Consumer Protection Act, 2002 and the Real Estate and Business Brokers Act, 2002 and to make consequential amendments to other Acts. I know it's a long title here for this morning, but as was discussed earlier, it's seeking to increase the protection provided to certain consumers in Ontario.

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This bill is generally aimed in the right direction. Today's consumers face a bewildering array of daily choices. I think that we should make it a priority to do more consumer protection pieces of legislation that make it easier for consumers. That is our job as legislators on this provincial level—the legislation or laws that we touch upon—because I hear from my constituents in Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock quite often that these contracts are often intricate and complicated, forcing people to weigh uncertain benefits and costs.

As if making these calculations weren't enough, certain salespeople selling products have the opportunity to

take advantage of the situation to score the quick sale. Sometimes we see time-pressure tactics. Sometimes it's incomprehensible contracts and agreements. We've all experienced the persuasiveness of a salesman at your door offering an amazing deal that needs to be signed right away or lost forever.

Certainly, we speak of seniors, who are most often at risk, and I have a higher population of seniors in my area than the provincial average, so they need some more protection. It's hard because 95% of the people are so well intentioned and think other people out there are also, and can easily get tricked into difficult contracts that they can't get out of. There are obviously very, very sad stories out there.

I think, also, we suffer a lot sometimes from financial illiteracy, a lack of financial literacy, which is the ability to understand advertising and contracts so that consumers can make better choices about what they buy and avoid the many pitfalls and scams out there, of which this bill attempts to address but a handful. As I said, we're kind of in the right direction, but more needs to be done. It has been mentioned previously in this debate, but I want to reiterate that my colleague from Nepean-Carleton had made some very constructive policy suggestions on how to improve financial literacy in Ontario.

Given all these considerations, it's clear that consumer protection is a hugely important issue for us to address. We have not only to take steps but take steps in the right direction.

I know that consumer protection can take many forms. Just in the Durham region papers, we have in the last few days, "Bowmanville Green-Power Promoter Guilty of Defrauding Investors." Investors sank money into a Bowmanville-based green energy company, and they were bilked for more than \$600,000. There's consumer protection.

I could say a lot about the Green Energy Act and forcing industrial wind turbines on our area that we don't want. I know the Minister of Energy is just coming in and wants to hear that we do protest it—unwilling communities that don't want industrial wind turbines; certainly mine are that. But now we also have people selling almost door to door a shaky bill of goods about investing in green energy products.

The consumer protection, this just deals with a few; there's lots more areas out there that can be dealt with.

Returning to the substance of the bill, there are some things in it that are clearly positive for consumer protection, but the bill seems to follow a recurring pattern we've seen under this government: legislation heavy on feel-good rhetoric but light on truly effective content.

Debt settlement is in the bill; that's the first area that's covered. It's clear that the current framework for debt settlement services does not give consumers nearly enough protection. We have all seen or heard the advertisements for companies offering to consolidate all your debts into one easy payment. These are services that are intensely advertised across the province. It's easy to imagine hard-pressed Ontarians with the debt collector at

their door and looking at their most recent hydro bill turning to these services as their desperation mounts. A person turning to this service will almost certainly be under intense stress and pressure, so the need to protect them is correspondingly increased. Some of the measures in the bill are useful steps toward providing some protection for these consumers. Some companies offering debt settlement services charge high administrative fees and may not deliver on their promised services, while hidden contract clauses often reduce or eliminate the value of the original service offered. These upfront fees can force already-indebted people into even more debt; therefore one area of strength of Bill 55 is in banning the practice of debt settlers charging these upfront fees before services are provided and limiting the amount of fees charged overall.

I also see some positive aspects to the bill's treatment of advertising within the debt settlement industry. Honesty and transparency in advertising is a fundamental necessity to the efficient and fair operation of any market. I note with approval that this bill prohibits misleading sales practices and advertising in this industry.

A disappointing area of weakness for the legislation is that it does not ensure that the consumer will not be the target of collection agencies once a debt settlement contract is signed. I think that the bill could be improved by ensuring that a contract with a debt settler guarantees that the consumer will be left alone by collectors.

Speaking of consumer protection still, another possible area is, I noticed last week that parents in the Ridgewood Public School, which is in Cobourg in my area, actually pulled their children from their EQAO testing to protest the loss of extracurriculars. Where is the protection for parents and children who want to get an education? The parents said, "It shouldn't have come to this.... teachers graduate from university knowing extracurriculars exist and are an 'expected' part of the job." Some parents are saying, "Well, maybe I'm going to pull my kids from school and home school them or change the school they're in." Where is the protection for parents and children in the school system? The bill doesn't address this, but I just wanted to highlight the fact that these parents took a principled stand for their children, and I applaud them for doing that.

Another area of the bill is the door-to-door water heater sales. I mentioned earlier the pressures put on consumers when salesmen come to their front door to sell them certain products. This bill deals with a specific instance of this practice in addressing water heater rentals. We've all heard the water heater rental stories. Again, there are some positive aspects to its contents. Mandatory disclosure, restrictions on certain advertising practices, and stiffer penalties for breaking the rules are probably good steps forward towards protection for consumers. The type of tactics sometimes employed by those renting water heaters door to door are often exactly the kind that exploit the most vulnerable people. Ontario water heater renters are all too often unaware of the details of the agreement they are signing, which violates

a fundamental principal of a fair market and poses real dangers to the consumer.

There are a couple of areas where the bill falls short in addressing this issue. Firstly, the legislation seems to focus on a mandatory cooling-off period as a means of protecting the consumer. The point of a cooling-off period is to allow the consumer to reflect on their decision and remove the pressure element from that calculation; however, the effectiveness of a cooling-off period is completely negated if the consumer doesn't understand their agreement to begin with. To reflect and cool off about your rental, you need to know exactly what you've agreed to in the first place. It is only once consumers experience a problem with their rental contract that they'll have any cause to question the value of their purchase. This will inevitably happen long after the 20-day cooling-off period proposed in this bill.

I think that I've mentioned before that, for consumer protection, there needs to be some type of template for general or normal contracts that exist out there. Certainly, there are complicated cases that will need their own contract, but I think you have to streamline contracts, whether it be for the cellphones or for the water heater-cooler. You have to have a standard contract that's easy for people to understand. We are obviously discussing a consumer protection bill because there's a need. We hear it in our constituencies, in our areas, from people. We need to do more consumer protection. There's lots of runaround that consumers do get, but most of them don't really realize that they do have a faulty contract, or if you get the 20-page contract or the five-page contract, it's just too hard for people to understand. The government has chosen to regulate these kinds of frustrating cancellation procedures in other industries, so I'm puzzled why they wouldn't do it in this case. Just a last point. I know that I will be able to do some more in the two-minute hit.

0940

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Questions and comments?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Most of this bill, I guess, is pretty supportive in regard to what the government is doing, but they're pretty small steps when it comes to consumer protection. I think that's the point that the honourable member was trying to make.

Take a look at the debt settlement services issue. What's now going to happen under this act is we're going to regulate them in some way, but the people who do the credit counselling, who essentially work for the big banks and the credit card companies and stuff, are not going to be regulated under this act. I think that's a bit of an anomaly in the bill, because what you end up with is, those who are trying to provide credit counselling in a way that allows people to settle their debt at 60 cents or 70 cents on the dollar are going to be regulated, but those people who do credit counselling who work for the banks, who normally settle it at 90 cents on the dollar, are not going to be regulated. I think that's something we can take a look at.

Interjection.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: The minister is indicating she's prepared to look at that when this bill gets to committee.

Interjection.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Well, they're in it, but it's not as clear-cut as it's being made out. The point is, once we get into committee, that's one of the things that we'll be able to look at.

The stuff in regard to the hot water heaters, I think, is long overdue, as it is for a whole bunch of people who are knocking at our doors. How many of us had energy marketers come and knock at our constituents' doors, and as a result of legislation that was originally passed as a private member's bill—I think it was by us; it might have been somebody else, but I think it was one of our bills—the government adopted a bill that essentially dealt with part of that issue, and we've been able to undo some of the damage that was done by people who go knocking at the door: Somebody, unsuspecting, thinks they're getting a good deal, they sign on the dotted line, and they find out that in fact the cost of energy is going to be a lot higher.

I think this is a step in the right direction, but there's a lot more than can still be done.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The minister responsible for seniors.

Hon. Mario Sergio: I was listening to the positive comments made by the member from Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock. I think by now everyone is fully aware of the content of the bill, what the bill intends to do. We've had over 12 hours of debate. I think it's time that we move the bill forward, and once it goes to committee, bring it back as a better bill. I would say at this stage, let's move on; let's get on with it. It's good for consumer protection, so let's do it.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further comment?

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: I'm not sure getting to committee is a good idea in this Parliament. The committee seems to be a black hole. I don't know if they're even going to meet this summer. It's amazing that these things take place.

The member from Peterborough, or Lindsay—

Ms. Laurie Scott: Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock.

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: —Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock; it's out near Lindsay—has made good points about consumer protection and went so far as to suggest that consumer protection is even available in schools, when the people in her community withheld their children from testing in objection to the kerfuffles that were going on in the education system.

It's interesting as well that this government brings in a bill on consumer protection on the one hand, and on the other hand brings in an eco tax bill which is going to hide the taxes that consumers pay. How can a consumer be protected when the taxes that are being levied—by a third-party group; they're not even levied by the government—are being hidden in the price? The minister should look into that. It's happening in her government, and it's

terribly unfair to the consumers of this province. They won't know what they're paying, and yet this government doesn't seem to be concerned about it. It's bringing in this bill which will give a third party, with no responsibility to the people of Ontario—it's a third party that has no oversight, is not responsible to the people of Ontario.

Interjections.

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: Well, you wait and see if they have oversight or not. The next time there's a crisis over there, it will be because of an arm's-length body that you appointed, such as this eco tax group. It's all the arm's-length bodies that get this government in trouble, because you fail to have any respectable oversight on everything.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further comments.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: I'm glad to add a couple of comments to this debate. One of the things I urge the government to consider—and either way I'm hoping that we'll bring some amendments to the bill—is that when we are talking about water heaters, it can easily be expanded to deal with energy in general to address the door-to-door energy provider sales. That's an area that I think naturally flows along with the water heaters, so I'll ask the government to consider expanding this bill to include that as well. All too often, as my colleague from Timmins—James Bay indicated, people end up signing an agreement for a new energy provider, and it turns out that wasn't the best idea for them, that wasn't the best deal. They sometimes end up paying more for that. That might be an area to consider.

On the debt settlement services portion, I think often when we speak to constituents, what they're facing is a lot of pressure from collection agencies. That's where there are a lot of concerns. I think the concerns are less with the debt settlement services than with the collection agents and their aggressive tactics. I think while having some protection in place and some regulations in place to cover some of the bad practices within the debt settlement services—there are a lot of bad practices on the other end, on the collection side. So I urge the government to consider some amendments to this bill that would also expand protection for the consumers where it comes to those collection agents and perhaps toning down the language they use, the aggressive approaches, the intimidation. Many constituents have called and complained about the tactics used by those collection agents and the fact they feel they're overwhelmed by phone calls, letters and threats of litigation. I think that's another area where we should definitely expand the bill; then we can cover a broader area of consumer protection.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The member has two minutes to respond.

Ms. Laurie Scott: I appreciate the comments from the member from Timmins—James Bay, the Minister of Consumer Services, the minister responsible for seniors, the member from Halton and the member from Bramalea—Gore—Malton. We've had great discussion on this bill.

I know that I wasn't quite able to touch on the third aspect of the bill, which is real estate. I'm glad to see the

government move to loosen the restrictions placed on custom pricing of real estate services, allowing buyers and sellers to negotiate a balance of commission and fees. It gives both parties more choice and will likely lead to better outcomes for both. I do applaud certain aspects of the bill, and the minister—and she hasn't been a minister for that long—has brought these forward. So I applaud her for doing that.

As you can probably tell from what we have said, we would actually like to see the bill strengthened; so more consumer protection. Hopefully, when we get to committee—and I'm hoping there's some agreement with the House leaders that we can have committees meet over the summer, not just on this topic but on the topics we have moving forward. We do want to get some things finished, some reports completed—in my case, on general government—some gridlock studies done.

We hope that we can actually put some more meat into this bill for consumer protection. As I mentioned earlier, we don't do enough for consumer protection in the province of Ontario, and we as legislators need to do a better job of consumer protection. We applaud the minister for the initial steps of the three main areas I outlined this morning—and the feedback from other members in the Legislature—but there are a lot more consumers out there that need to be protected on various topics. I mentioned even education on industrial wind turbine salespeople. Maybe those suggestions can come forward before committee. Thank you for the opportunity to speak this morning.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further debate.

Mr. Rob E. Milligan: It's always a privilege and great honour to stand in the chamber to debate the concerns of not only the government but those here in opposition, the bills that are brought forward that are going to actually have an impact on the lives of everyday Ontarians and what's going to happen to them and how it's going to affect their pocketbooks, Madam Speaker. That's one of the strong points of our party: that we're already taxed enough. We appreciate the fact that this government has brought in so many taxes and has burdened the residents of this great province to an extent where they're overtaxed.

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Consumer protection is one thing. We're all in favour of consumer protection. It's good to have some guidelines as to where we can actually have some influence to protect those who don't read the fine print. You almost need a lawyer to enter any kind of agreement nowadays, whether it's your cellphone agreement and what you can and cannot do and how much money you have to pay, should you go over. It's endless.

I want to draw upon the attention of what the fine member for Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock has done, and that is, if you want to be accountable as a consumer and also accountable as a government, which I think is even more important, we do have to look at things like consumer protection and the Green Energy

Act and what the Green Energy Act has actually done for this province, which has been devastating, to say the least.

If we're looking at how much money Ontarians have to pay because they haven't been protected by this Liberal government under Premier Wynne and Premier McGuinty, then I have to say, where's the legislation that's being brought forward that's going to actually protect Ontarians from this Liberal government? I don't see it, Madam Speaker. I haven't seen it.

When I look at the bill here, Bill 55—because I make it a point that I actually read the bills. I sit there and I have to wonder. I'm a little perplexed sometimes. It says here:

"2(1) The definitions of 'collection agency' and 'collector' in subsection 1(1) of the act are repealed and the following substituted: ...

"(a) a person, other than a collector, who obtains or arranges for payment of money owing to another person or who holds oneself out to the public as providing such a service,

"(b) any such person who sells or offers to sell forms or letters represented to be a collection system or scheme, or

"(c) a person, other than a collector, who provides debt settlement services;..."

"'collector' means an individual employed, appointed or authorized by a collection agency to collect debts for the agency, to deal with or trace debtors for the agency or to provide debt settlement services to debtors on behalf of the agency."

This is relevant, obviously, when we're referring to debt and how much debt this Liberal government has incurred. So I would ask that this government actually bring forward a piece of legislation that is actually going to hold this government to account for the debt they have incurred. Who would that actually be, Madam Speaker? Who is going to call on this government and say, "Your debt is in arrears. You're not even making the minimum payments of interest on the debt you have incurred"? How can this government introduce legislation like Bill 55 here before us today when they themselves are the worst example of debtors and running up debt that this province has actually ever seen?

Historically, my great-great-grandfather was an MPP for York East back in 1894, and he stood here in this chamber—the debt incurred during his 10 years of service is almost insignificant, a fragment of what this government has done in the last decade, so I think it's pretty rich for a government that has actually incurred so much debt to bring in legislation that they claim is going to protect consumers, consumer debt, when they are the leaders in debt.

Also, "Subsection 1(1) of the act is amended by adding the following definitions:

"'debt settlement services' means offering or undertaking to act for a debtor in arrangements or negotiations with the debtor's creditors or receiving money from a debtor for distribution of the debtor's creditors, where the

services are provided in consideration of a fee, commission or other remuneration that is payable by the debtor;..."

"'debt settlement services agreement' means an agreement under which a collection agency provides debt settlement services to a debtor."

Well, Madam Speaker, I'm sure the government, because of all the debt they have accumulated, have negotiated with their creditors how much money they're going to actually have to pay back on the backs of our children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren because this government hasn't had their fiscal house in order for the last decade.

Number 3 in the schedule: "Section 2 of the act is amended by adding the following subsection:

"(0.1) This act applies to a collection agency or collector that deals with a debtor if either the debtor or the applicable one of the collection agency or the collector is located in Ontario when the dealing takes place."

Well, as mentioned earlier in the House several days ago, Madam Speaker, as you're well aware, when we pay interest on our provincial debt, that money leaves this province. It has a dramatic impact on the infrastructure, whether it's roads, bridges, education, health care, but that investment, that money, that interest that we pay on our debts, goes to foreign entities, foreign countries, where that money is actually being invested by them in health care, in education, into their infrastructure, roads and maintenance. So I'm a little perplexed again about this Bill 55.

It says here: "The act is amended by adding the following sections:

"2.1 In determining whether this act applies to an entity or transaction, a court or other tribunal shall consider the real substance of the entity or transaction and in so doing may disregard the outward form."

What can I say about this? I'm a little perplexed—

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Say no more.

Mr. Rob E. Milligan: Say no more—I'm almost at my wits' end with this government when it comes to introducing bills that have no real substance, and as mentioned earlier by the fine member of Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock, this is heavy on feel good and little on actual substance.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Questions and comments?

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: I want to build on a point that my colleague from Trinity-Spadina mentioned earlier, that one of the things that, on a principled basis, we do here in government is we provide protection for those who are vulnerable in our society, for those who are not in a position to protect themselves. In doing that, we recognize that there is sometimes an imbalance that exists in society, that there are certain entities, whether they're corporations, whether they're organizations, that have a knowledge base and a marketing strategy that some citizens in our society may not be able to fully understand the repercussions of. So when they make agreements or they sign on the dotted line that enters them into a contract, they don't know exactly what they're getting

into. There could be issues of literacy. There could be issues of numeracy. There could be issues of language barriers. So we acknowledge that one of our responsibilities is to provide support for those members of our society and to even the playing field somewhat.

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One very effective strategy to even that playing field to provide some advocacy for people in this society, in this community, would be to have a dedicated consumer advocate. Either we broaden the mandate of the Ombudsman to allow the Ombudsman's office to accept complaints surrounding consumer services or we have a dedicated consumer advocate who raises issues surrounding problems faced by consumers, inequities, unfair contracts, unfair practices. That would be a step forward in providing a very wholesome approach to protecting the rights of our citizens.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The member for Oakville.

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: It's a pleasure to rise and to tell the House that I agree with the comments of the member from Northumberland—Quinte West when he said he didn't know what to say next. I'm pretty sure it's all been said, Speaker. At least two parties in this House think that 15 hours is enough and it's time to move this on to committee.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further comments?

Ms. Laurie Scott: I'm pleased to rise today and provide comment on the member from Northumberland, who is a new member to this Legislature and is doing a fantastic job of representing his constituents. He read that piece of legislation, and I can't say that all members read every piece of legislation that is brought forward. So thank you for reading that, because he wants to do the best he can for consumer protection in the province of Ontario.

Mr. John Yakabuski: And his constituents.

Ms. Laurie Scott: Yes, and his constituents.

As I have said, and as he said also, the Liberals always speak a good talk—little action. A lot more needs to be done. This is why we continue to talk. We're bringing up ideas right here as we speak in the Legislature on debate about Bill 55. We all want to protect our constituents. As I said, again, a lot more needs to be done for consumer protection in the province of Ontario.

I also want to point out that he said that his great-great-grandfather—correct?—served in this Legislature from 1894 to 1904. So thank you, Rob Milligan, the member for Northumberland, for carrying on that fine family tradition of serving your constituents in the Legislature. A little different period of time, but I'm sure they were talking about trying to do the right things for the people of their constituencies also.

We do have other members in the Legislature, the member from Halton and the member from Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, whose family members served in the Legislature also. I know the member from Parry Sound—Muskoka is not here, but he also has a legacy of

carrying on a family tradition of serving in this Ontario Legislature and representing the fine people in their constituencies.

I wanted just to say to the Liberal government that we're making good suggestions in our debate, so we'd like to strengthen the bill. That's the purpose of what the member from Northumberland was saying this morning.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The member for Trinity—Spadina.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: I congratulate the member from Northumberland—Quinte West in his remarks, and I congratulate you on the heritage you bring to this place. I'm just a little guy from southern Italy; I don't have those connections. But, you know, we do our best. We fight it out—

Mr. John Yakabuski: But I know your ancestors did something big in Italy.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: That's a good question. I'm not quite sure. Marchese is a noble name, but whether we come from nobility is a different question altogether. I don't know.

But I wanted to say that I agree with the member from Northumberland when he says that we could make the bill better. I agree with that; I think we can. I think that when we're talking about consumer protection, we can do a better job.

This is a modest bill that moves the agenda a long way to give consumers greater protection. How do we make it better? Well, when we send it to committee, if we're serious and we actually listen to what people have to say, we might be able to get a stronger bill. In a minority government, this is where all three parties can collaborate to make it stronger.

I'm actually a big believer in public education—I am—not because I was an ex-teacher and an ex-school trustee, but because the more we help the public to understand what their sometimes obligations are and responsibilities are, and also help them to understand what their legal rights are and how they're able to win it by applying the law—we can't do that unless we inform the public about what their rights and powers are.

The better way to do it is to bring in a consumer advocate who would provide the protection that they need, because the majority of Ontarians simply do not have the time to understand what their powers are and to defend themselves. The consumer advocate: That's the way to go.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The member for Northumberland—Quinte West has two minutes to respond.

Mr. Rob E. Milligan: I just want to thank the fine member from Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock for her enlightened comments and her insight into this bill. I have to say that that riding has probably never been more represented than it is now with the fine member that they currently have. I want to thank her for her service and her duty that she has.

To the bill: There were some keen observations. I want to thank the member from Oakville, who actually said that I was at a loss for words, which is, for a politician, almost unheard of.

There's a lot that has to be done with Bill 55. When it does eventually get to committee, we do have some very good ideas, as the member from Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock pointed out. We are going to bring those ideas and initiatives forward, and hopefully, when it gets to committee, it will be addressed.

I also want to thank the member from Trinity-Spadina. As misguided as he is, sitting with the NDP, I'm sure he serves his party with distinction. He does bring up, now and again, some relative points. Especially with Bill 55, Madam Speaker, this is obviously an area again where we are for protecting the consumers, protecting individuals who actually aren't as enlightened, or need to be educated.

It's always one of those things. I'm neglectful myself when it comes to reading the fine print for a lot of things that we sign. You almost need an entourage of lawyers to actually enter agreements nowadays.

I want to thank the members for their fine comments.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further debate?

Mrs. Jane McKenna: It is my pleasure to join the debate on Bill 55 today.

One of the key aspects of a healthy, vital and prosperous Ontario is robust consumer protection for the people of Ontario. Bill 55 was designed with this greater good in mind and aims to strengthen consumer confidence and make Ontario's marketplace more clear and fair.

As such, we welcome this bill and have been encouraged by the constructive debate that has taken place around it. Together, we can improve this legislation for the benefit of all the people of Ontario.

When we talk about consumer protection, we're ultimately talking about protecting families and communities, because our society is not simply a collection of individuals living in isolation but a tapestry of interwoven relationships.

Citizenship itself is a kind of contract. A piece of legislation like Bill 55, that proposes to bolster consumer protections, is really a piece of legislation that has the capacity to improve society as a whole.

At the very least, the bill now before us should improve quality of life in some ways that are sure to be widely appreciated. Bill 55 looks to rein in aggressive door-to-door sales tactics, specifically with regard to the sale of water heaters, which have become an all-too-familiar source of grief for homeowners across the province. It proposes the sensible step of a cooling-off period, so that consumers can take a serious second look, if their initial gut check fails them.

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The bill also aims to protect consumers who become indebted against the misleading and excessive practices of debt settlement companies. Debt has become a more and more common part of our society, and in itself, it is not right or wrong. But when there is a lack of awareness and a lack of protection, hard-working people and vulnerable populations suffer. The nature of these services means that those who end up in that spot are low on

options and operate at a disadvantage from a bargaining standpoint. This is another example of the minister diagnosing a real and pressing problem and responding with what we hope is an antidote, something that will potentially help strengthen consumer protection.

Bill 55 would also enhance real estate bidding arrangements with more robust safeguards, and offer Ontario home sellers greater ability to negotiate flexible, low-cost arrangements. Real estate transactions are stressful enough without "gotcha" dealings, and both buyers and sellers deserve to know precisely what they pay brokers under any agreement, Speaker.

I commend the Minister of Consumer Services for taking steps to improve disclosure requirements and shift toward plain-language contracts, something that is of value not just to people who find themselves under a great deal of financial pressure, but also the elderly or those who have language barriers. It's important to be reminded that Ontario is a place of great diversity, and as a result, we must adjust the scope of legislation to do the greatest good for the most number of people.

The PC caucus is certainly supportive of consumer rights and clear language, which is why we will be supporting Bill 55 to get it into committee. Bill 55 will benefit from further review, and like any legislation we debate in this House, there are numerous ways this bill could be improved upon, and that discussion cannot simply begin and end with those of us in this chamber.

This is underlined by the fact that this bill is the product of an expanded consultation of sorts. Water heater complaints have spread like a rash across every corner of this province, and by themselves apparently inspired 3,200 complaints alone to the Ministry of Consumer Services in 2012. So it comes as no surprise that a large portion of this debate today has latched onto this aspect of the bill. Suspected shady water heater dealings, high-pressure door-to-door sales, aggressive retention tactics and negative-option billing practices were squarely in the spotlight through last year. Those practices were hammered by the Canadian Competition Bureau back in December.

A moving target, underhanded dealings will forever evolve, like a virus, to take advantage of gaps in legislation and lapses in awareness, and the marketplace is moving just as fast, so we as lawmakers have our work cut out for us. But it's unfortunate when something that should be a straightforward matter of quality services provided in a competitive, cost-effective manner becomes so laced with distrust and deception. It's a credit to the majority of business people who are straight dealers that this has not become an epidemic. Certainly, government oversight and enforcement is critical to making sure that honest dealings do not simply become a niche industry.

Government sets the tone, Speaker. On that note, I have to say it is difficult to argue that the Liberal government commands much in the way of principled high ground at this point. Six years ago, the Liberal government designed a piece of legislation that was intended to strengthen faith in the system through simple mechan-

isms of transparency and accountability. It appeared as part of a consumer protection omnibus bill that also addressed issues such as real estate fraud. The leader of that government was happy to take a bow and play up the inroads his party was making. But he ignored this legislation, which we have now learned has no teeth, no penalties, no real reason anyone should follow its rules. Like many government bills—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Sorry. The time has come when we must recess until 10:30.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The House recessed from 1015 to 1030.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mrs. Laura Albanese: I would like to introduce Julie Pontarollo, who is the mother of our page Jessica Pontarollo. Also, I would like to welcome to Queen's Park her grandmother Gemma Fiorini. Both Ms. Julie Pontarollo and Gemma Fiorini are in the public gallery this morning watching our proceedings. I want to welcome them again here in the Legislature. They are from the great riding of York South-Weston.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: I want to welcome Suzanne Halpenny, who is the grandmother of our page Laura from the great riding of Ottawa Centre. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I wanted to introduce my interns, wearing my hat as Minister of Agriculture and Food, and they are here with me today: Gabrielle Schachter, Parker Mackay, Zahin Chowdhury and Matt Scoon. I want to welcome them to the Legislature.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: I also want to welcome my intern at the Ministry of Labour, Roy Sengupta, who also lives in the great riding of Ottawa Centre. Roy, thank you for your hard work.

Ms. Sarah Campbell: Although they're not yet in the gallery, I wanted to give a warm welcome to the students of J.W. Walker school who have come all the way down from Fort Frances on a school bus. They come every year. I want to welcome them, and I hope they have a great visit in Toronto.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I would like to welcome, only because I've been goaded by my friend from northwestern Ontario, the people from Ministik school and Peetabeck Academy. From Ministik, they had to walk to the shore, they had to cross in a water taxi where there are no docks, get off in Moosonee, take a train, get down to Timmins and then get on a bus to get here. So all the way from Moose Factory and Fort Albany, welcome.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I would have been concerned if there was any walking on water.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Speaker, I am delighted to introduce Ryan Lake and Kiara Sanclar from the law firm Falconer Charney. Welcome.

Hon. Jeff Leal: I just want to commend the Leader of the Opposition on his great insight in picking the Boston Bruins in the Stanley Cup final. Good choice, Mr. Hudak.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): In respect to my friend from Nepean-Carleton, I'm going to ask that that be the last time introductions are made in that manner.

Further introductions?

The member from Newmarket-Aurora on a point of order.

Mr. Frank Klees: Speaker, on June 5, the Standing Committee on Public Accounts sent a letter to the Honourable John Milloy, the government House leader, with a specific request to seek authorization to meet as a committee for the purpose of discussing the affairs of Ornge.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): If this is a discussion on committee work, I don't perceive that to be a point of order, but I ask you to put your point quickly, please.

Mr. Frank Klees: My point is simply this: that we have not yet had authorization to meet as a committee. It's very important that we do. I would ask at least that we get a response from the government House leader authorizing us to meet as a committee.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): That's actually not a point of order. It's a required motion. I'll leave it at that. Thank you.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Further—one last point.

Mr. Frank Klees: In that case, Mr. Speaker, I would ask for unanimous consent of this House, authorizing the committee on public accounts to meet for the purpose of considering the issues related to the Ornge air ambulance.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Newmarket-Aurora has asked for unanimous consent for this meeting. I'm afraid I heard a no.

Minister of Children and Youth Services.

Hon. Teresa Piruzza: I do have an introduction of guests that I'd like to get back to—sorry about that—a couple of interns who are working in my ministry for the summer, for the Ministry of Children and Youth Services: Marie Brunetto and Abdullah Mushtaq, who are from Windsor. I just want to welcome them to the gallery for question period today.

SPECIAL REPORT, INFORMATION AND PRIVACY COMMISSIONER

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I beg to inform the House that I have laid upon the table a special investigation report by the Information and Privacy Commissioner entitled *Deleting Accountability: Record Management Practices of Political Staff*.

There being no further introductions, it is now time for question period.

ORAL QUESTIONS

ACCESS TO INFORMATION

Mr. Tim Hudak: My question is to the Premier. Premier, I also want to send a message to the NDP that there

is a choice before them today, a choice between making the right decision or the wrong one, a choice between propping up a corrupt government that has been part of not only one, but two OPP investigations. We all know that Ontarians deserve better, so I say to the NDP: Stand with us. Vote against this budget. Bring change to the province of Ontario and no longer prop up a corrupt government.

A question to the Premier: Premier, when exactly did you find out that emails from the Premier's—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I'm actually hearing the interruptions from both sides while the leader was putting the question.

Premier.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: While the Leader of the—oh, sorry.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I indicated that your time was up.

Interjection: Your time is up, all right.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Therein lies the problem. I suspect we may be a little anxious today. You have to listen carefully. I will be following my normal procedures.

I will offer the member a short conclusion for his question.

Mr. Tim Hudak: Thank you, Speaker. The question was very direct. I would ask the Premier to tell us exactly when she found out the emails from the Premier's office and the Ministry of Energy had been destroyed. What was the exact date?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I have answered a number of questions on this, and I have made it clear that when I came into this office, there were questions around information retention, and I put a protocol in place that means that the rules were very clear. I've said clearly that the rules were in place. We put them in place. We did training. We made it clear that relevant documents would be retained.

But the Leader of the Opposition is very correct that there is a choice before the House today. That is a choice to not take action or to move on a budget that would allow 30,000 young people to benefit from investments in employment; 46,000 seniors getting more home care; 57,000 recipients of social assistance being able to keep \$200 that they earn—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Tim Hudak: Respectfully to the Premier, I think the choice is clear: Do you want to prop up a corrupt government that is subject to not one but two OPP investigations and clean up this mess? I just hope that the colleagues in the New Democratic Party actually do the right thing and call for change to bring a cleanup to this incredible mess under the Liberal government.

1040

I ask the Premier—so I understand this: You're saying that you were aware that emails had been destroyed in the Premier's office and the Ministry of Energy. You just

said that you found this out when you became Premier, and you ordered a new system.

On February 28, you told us all the documents had been released, when in fact you knew that—who knows?—tens of thousands of emails had been permanently erased, that members of the Liberal Party had engaged in criminal behaviour.

If you knew this, why did you hide it? Why did you cover it up—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Question.

Mr. Tim Hudak: —part of the problem instead of solving the problem?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. I'm going to ask the leader to withdraw.

Mr. Tim Hudak: Withdraw.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Premier.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: This could be the last day of the Legislature, Mr. Speaker, and I have said this repeatedly—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Dufferin–Caledon, come to order.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: —that when I came into this office, I endeavoured to do everything in my power to get the information that was being asked for—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Leeds–Grenville, come to order.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: —to get that information out.

I've also said publicly that there were many questions about the documents; there were questions about information; there were questions about all of the issues around the relocation of the gas plant.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Minister of the Environment, come to order.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: When I came into this office, I made it clear that we were going to get the information out, that we were going to offer to open up the mandate of the committee—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Member from Halton, come to order.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: —that we were going to offer to put in place mechanisms to allow that information to get out, and that we were going to have protocols in my office and across government that would retain the relevant information, to make sure that information was available.

We've done all that, Mr. Speaker, and we will continue to behave in that manner.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary?

Mr. Tim Hudak: Frankly, Premier, that kind of doublespeak doesn't pass the smell test. Ontarians—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): That's not acceptable. Withdraw, please.

Mr. Tim Hudak: Withdraw.

Premier, you're obviously trying to dodge the first question. You said you were aware that emails had been

deleted. I thought you had said that there were problems with deleted emails, clearly, in the Premier's office and the Ministry of Energy, to cover up this gas plant scandal.

So you knew this happened. Otherwise, I guess you're saying a little birdie told you that there may be some deleted emails somewhere, and you ordered a new protocol. That just doesn't add up. Clearly, Premier, you knew this was there.

You stood up in the Legislature in February and said you had released all the documents, but you knew that you had not. You knew that emails had been deleted across the board. You knew that senior Liberals had walked away with documents.

The question is not what you say, it's what you do. Who got fired? Why didn't you call in the OPP? Why did you sit there and actually not tell the truth to Ontarians about the cover-up that is all over your very own hands?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Thank you.

Premier.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: As I said, I have answered these questions many times.

I'm going to go back to the question—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Prince Edward–Hastings, come to order.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: —at the beginning of the Leader of the Opposition's time—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Member from Northumberland, come to order.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: —and that was about the choice that is confronting us today.

I really believe that the choice that is before this House is whether we move ahead, to invest in youth employment in this province; to invest in home care for our seniors, for our loved ones, our grandparents, our parents; to work with the auto insurance industry to reduce, on average, across the board, the auto insurance rates; to make sure that people who are trying to get into the workforce and are working—people with disabilities—are allowed to keep the money they earn to a much greater degree; and to make sure that the investments in infrastructure across the province, but particularly in our rural and northern municipalities—that those roads and bridges get tended to. That's the choice before us.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock, please. Be seated, please.

If you haven't noticed, I've already started identifying individual ridings. If it continues, you'll move towards a warning.

New question.

ACCESS TO INFORMATION

Mr. Tim Hudak: Clearly, Premier, you knew that the emails had been deleted by senior Liberals. You chose to tell the public and members of the assembly that you'd

released all the documents, when you knew that they had been destroyed. You knew that they had engaged in criminal behaviour.

You want to talk about choices. You chose to look the other way. You chose for them to walk away with that data that is very pertinent to the debate before the Legislature.

I regret saying this, but quite frankly, Premier, we thought Dalton McGuinty was bad; you're more of the same. So when you say that you've accepted and agreed with the report of the Information and Privacy Commissioner, if you say that you agree with her recommendations, is it fair to say that you agree that senior Liberals committed criminal activity?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Here's what I agree with: I agree that we are in a minority Parliament, Mr. Speaker, and when I came into this office, in my leadership I said that I was going to do everything in my power to work within this government to make sure that we could bring a budget forward and that we could act in the best interests of the people of Ontario. I've done that.

I want to say that it was very heartening to me that the leader of the third party was willing to work with us. She and I met, as I met with the Leader of the Opposition. But working with the leader of the third party, she brought forward suggestions, even to the point where she brought forward the idea of the Financial Accountability Officer. I want to say thank you for that, because that was a good idea and something that we can act on. I believe that is how minority Parliament works, I believe that's how government works, and I believe that minority Parliament or not, we should be—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Supplementary.

Mr. Tim Hudak: Well, you know, of course, Premier, you're going to thank the leader of the NDP. She's tied herself into a human pretzel just to prop up a corrupt government.

I know you're trying to avoid the essence of the question. You've said that you knew there were deleted emails; that's why you brought a protocol into place. You said you agree with the findings of the Information and Privacy Commissioner, but you won't say that they engaged in criminal activity, which seems to be the case. So I guess, then, I'll ask you this: Why is it the Ontario PC Party that had to call in the OPP? Why is it the Ontario PC Party that had to demand the release of that data, to go to those individual senior Liberals and bring that data back for public inspection? Why is it the Ontario PCs that have to hold everybody to account? Why aren't you doing your job as Premier?

You know what, Premier? You look the same as a tired, corrupt McGuinty Liberal government. It's time for change in the province of Ontario.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I'm actually not trying to avoid the issue, because the issue that's being raised is a personal attack on me and on the leader of the third party, and, Mr. Speaker, that's fine. That is within his purview if that's what he chooses to do. I'm not trying to draw the leader of the third party in so close that she has to deny what she's done. But the reality is that I believe that the people of this province expect us to work together. I believe the people of this province expect the opposition to read the budget before they decide to vote against it. That would have been my expectation.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Thank you.

Final supplementary.

Mr. Tim Hudak: You know, I think, Premier, with all due respect, Ontarians expect their government to actually obey the law, not break it. They expect them to bring information forward, not hide it.

Now, Premier, you've avoided two very direct and simple questions. You say that you heard there were issues around deleted emails, but you didn't tell us exactly when you found out about senior Liberals destroying emails related to the gas plant crisis. You also refused to answer the direct question as to whether you agree that this is actually criminal behaviour.

Premier, quite frankly, if you are not solving the problem, you are part of the problem. Isn't it time for change in the province of Ontario and a government that will clean up the incredible Liberal mess?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I actually have been working to solve the problem. That's why we opened up the mandate of the justice committee. That's why I appeared before committee. That's why I asked the Auditor General to look at the Oakville situation.

The fact is, Mr. Speaker, that my job was, yes, to deal with those issues that had been raised, and I have been doing that, but my job was also to bring forward a budget, to work with the opposition to try to put in place the mechanisms that would mean there will be more jobs created in this province, that we will deal with the home care that's needed in this province, and that we will invest in infrastructure in the GTHA and in our rural communities beyond the GTHA. Those are the issues that affect people's lives every single day, and that's why we brought a budget forward.

1050

I looked across the floor to work with the opposition, to work with the third party. The opposition determined that they weren't going to read the budget. The third party determined they were going to read it and they were going to work with us, and that's how it should work.

ACCESS TO INFORMATION

Ms. Andrea Horwath: I want to ask some questions to the Premier about government accountability. Does the

Premier think that it is acceptable that staff in her Liberal government—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Come to order.

The member from Prince Edward—Hastings, come to order.

Now that I have your attention, I will make it clear that if the banging continues—while you're quiet and listening. If the banging continues, I will give you warnings.

Leader of the third party.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Does the Premier think it's acceptable that staff in her Liberal government were deleting emails and destroying information that belonged to the public?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I have said repeatedly that I agree with the conclusions of the privacy commissioner, that there were practices that were going on that should not have and there need to be changes. My office is working with the privacy commissioner to ensure that we put in place the changes that need to be there.

I will say that we have already proactively taken some initiatives to put in place training, to make it clear across government what the rules are about retaining documents and retaining information. We will continue to work with the privacy commissioner.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Does the Premier think it is acceptable that her predecessor, the member for Ottawa South, may refuse to answer any questions about mass deletion of government documents when he occupied the Premier's office?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: As I have said, I believe there were actions taken that shouldn't have been. I agree with the recommendations of the privacy commissioner. I have also encouraged anyone who is called to the committee to attend.

I believe there wasn't enough done to ensure that staff understood what the rules were and that there needed to be a more stringent protocol put in place. That's what we did. That's why we put the training in place, and we'll continue to work with the privacy commissioner.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Does the Premier understand the fundamental fact that the people who sent us here expect us to work hard for them and that they want to see a government that's accountable to them and puts people first, not the governing party or its well-connected insiders?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I do understand that. That's why, since I've been in this office, I have taken the actions that I have. Whether it was about opening up the process around the relocation of the gas plants or whether it was about making sure that everyone understood what the rules are about document retention, I have taken those actions because I believe I am fully accountable to the people of Ontario. It's also why I have attempted to work with the opposition to bring forward a budget that speaks to the needs of the people of Ontario.

That's why we're going to be continuing to meet those needs as we work to get the budget passed today.

GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My next question is for the Premier. We've worked hard this session to deliver real change, change that creates jobs, improves health care and makes life more affordable for the people who sent us here, change that will make this government and future governments accountable and transparent.

We've ensured that the government will pass legislation establishing a Financial Accountability Office this fall. Does the Premier understand that this measure is needed to stop scandals like the ones that occurred under their watch, like eHealth, like Ornge, like the gas plant scandal, from ever happening again?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Yes. I think even in this session I've already given the leader of the third party credit for bringing forward the idea of the Financial Accountability Office. It speaks to a value that I hold dear and that our government holds dear, that we should do everything we can to put those mechanisms in place that ensure that, as we go forward, we don't make the same mistakes, that we, collectively, don't make the same mistakes that may have been made in the past. That is part of the evolving nature of government, Mr. Speaker, so I credit the leader of the third party for working to find mechanisms that would ensure that kind of accountability. When she first raised the issue, I said that I thought it was a good idea, and we will be moving forward with that.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, unlike some others in this House, we are actually working hard to get some real results and some real accountability for the people who elected us. But time and time again, people see a Liberal government putting the interests of the well-connected insiders and their own party ahead of the people who elected them. Is the Premier ready to admit that this government has fallen short?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Well, you know, I will say that we have at every turn attempted to find ways to meet the needs of the people in the province, whether it's in reforms in education or in health care or the investments in infrastructure that are critical across the province. We have attempted to do everything in our power to meet the needs of the people and make sure that the services that they require are delivered. That's what our budget is about. The leader of the third party identified some areas that she had some input on, and we have been happy to be able to work with her.

But make no mistake, Mr. Speaker, whether it's youth employment or home care or infrastructure, those are issues that we were concerned about. Those are issues that we were going to act on. I appreciate that the leader of the third party has worked with us, I appreciate that we're going to bring the budget and, with luck, get it passed today, but we need to understand that that is work that we understood needed to be done.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: In tough times, people want government that's accountable and government that's working hard for them, and I have to say once again that we have worked very hard to deliver real results—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Order, please.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Order. Order, please.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I'm not asking for quiet so that you can throw your last barbs in, and I remind all members that you refer to people in this place according to their title or their riding.

The leader of the third party.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: But time and time again, what they've seen is a government trying to avoid accountability, and putting themselves first, whether it is six-figure golden handshakes to public sector CEOs, the destruction of documents—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Member from Barrie, come to order.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: —or collaborating with the Conservative caucus to shut down gas plant hearings this summer. Is the Premier ready to admit that this government has fallen short?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I want to just say that the hoots and howls that are coming from the opposition are coming from a party that did not read the budget before they determined that they were going to vote against it. They did not engage in a discussion about youth employment, they did not engage in a discussion about infrastructure investment, and they did not engage in a discussion about home care. We just have to take that into account.

I will say to the leader of the third party that we have made it our business, since we came into this office—since I came into this office, we have made it our business to work to address the issues that were before us, including the issues of accountability on decisions that were made vis-à-vis the relocation of the gas plants.

I will continue to work with my party, to work with my government, to make sure that we do everything in our power to be open to the people of the province, to put in place the accountability measures that are necessary, but we're also going to work to make sure that the services that people need are the services that are delivered to them.

GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: My question is to the Premier. Premier, there's not a single Ontarian who takes pleasure in watching your government flail around in total disarray. Under your leadership, you are now embroiled in not just one but two OPP investigations, one in particular

into the gas plant scandal, one which the NDP leader, Andrea Horwath, has said is the worst scandal in Ontario's history.

1100

Let's recount what happened. You bought an election with taxpayer dollars. Senior staff destroyed the evidence. They refused to call in—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Your question is direct, so I'm going to ask the member to withdraw.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Withdraw? The government bought an election, they destroyed the evidence, they refused to bring in the OPP—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): You said it again. Withdraw, please.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Withdraw.

In any event, they refused to call in the OPP. We had to do that for them. Now they refuse to hold key architects accountable.

Will you fire Brad Duguid, Mr. McLennan and the member from Ottawa South?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Government House leader.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Thank you.

Government House leader.

Hon. John Milloy: Mr. Speaker, I think all members of the House realize that this is a serious matter that we're dealing with, a serious matter that's in front of the justice committee. But I think it's time that people over there started to deal with facts.

Let me talk about the members who stood up over the last several days and spoke about some mysterious USB keys. I quote from an article in QP Briefing: "No evidence of theft in Cavoukian report: IPC spokesman."

Let me quote: "It doesn't say in the report anything about files downloaded onto USB keys," Cavoukian spokesman Trell Huether said. 'She doesn't believe that happened, and if she did she would have put it in the report.'"

Where is the apology from members over there? This is a serious matter, and it's time we started dealing with facts.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: This question was actually to the Premier, because it deals with people in her caucus and former staff in her employ who are currently still being paid for with taxpayer dollars. We asked specifically if she would fire out of her caucus and tell the former Premier, the member from Ottawa South, to resign his seat.

She has been ruthless enough in this entire period to sell out the people of this province on what she knew and when she knew it on the gas plant scandal. They have circumvented the law by destroying documents. She has also used a personal Gmail account to evade the laws within access to information. They refused to call in the OPP; we did it for them. Now she's letting the member from Ottawa South thumb his nose at the constituents who sent him to this place.

Is there any legal or moral barrier that this Premier will not cross in order to cling to power and save the skins of every member over there?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Be seated, please. Thank you.

Government House leader.

Hon. John Milloy: You don't get away with it that easy. Mr. Speaker, the member from Nipissing, the member from Cambridge and other members have been standing in this House and talking about USB keys. They've been going out in front of the House in scrums and talking about it. Here we have a spokesperson for the Information and Privacy Commissioner saying that they do not exist; they are not in the report because they didn't exist.

We are talking about people's reputations. We are talking about a serious matter. I demand an apology from her.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Be seated, please. Order. Order. Thank you.

New question.

EXECUTIVE COMPENSATION

M^{me} France Gélinas: Ma question est pour le premier ministre. This government's refusal to bring forward an executive wage freeze is yet again putting Ontario on the hook for a ludicrous payout. The CEO of eHealth has given his notice, and he will be paid over \$400,000 because he's leaving his job six months early.

New Democrats have asked this government to take concrete steps to prevent this kind of golden handshake. My question is simple: Does the Premier think that Ontarians should be on the hook for yet another executive payout?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Health and Long-Term Care.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I know I'll have time in the supplementary to discuss the compensation issue, but I do want to take this opportunity to thank Greg Reed for the leadership at eHealth. Under Greg Reed's leadership, we have come a long, long way, and we are seeing the results of his work.

Speaker, eHealth has become more transparent. It has become more accountable. We have now a long-term strategy for electronic health records. We've made real progress in implementing electronic health record systems right across the province. Today, two out of three Ontarians have an electronic medical record. More than 9,000 physicians are using EMRs to enhance patient care, improve health outcomes, improve patient safety.

The Ontario Laboratories Information System, OLIS, is storing more than one billion lab results for 9.5 million Ontarians. Neurotrauma patients now have access to 24/7—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): If this is a test of my resolve, I shall show you. The member from Northumberland—Quinte West is warned.

Supplementary?

M^{me} France Gélinas: I can't believe that the minister would stand there and defend executive compensation. I asked a question about \$400,000 for leaving six months early, and she goes on praising him, as in, "Should we give him a raise, make that \$400,000 instead \$800,000?" What is this?

Ontarians are sick and tired of the scandal coming out of the Ministry of Health under this government. We've seen eHealth. We've seen Ornge. We've seen diluted chemo drugs. We've seen seniors in long-term care with no oversight—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Member from Prince Edward—Hastings.

M^{me} France Gélinas: —yet we're seeing another round of scandal at the same agency, eHealth, that was supposed to be fixed years ago.

New Democrats have long called for concrete action, like a wage freeze and Ombudsman oversight of our health care system, but the government keeps refusing. How many more scandals will it take before things start to change and executive compensations come under scrutiny?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Just to be clear, the member is wrong when she says that he's getting this because he is leaving six months early. That simply is not accurate. It's part of his compensation package.

But there is a larger issue here, and it's an issue that this government is addressing. As part of our 2013 budget, which I hope is going to pass this afternoon, we announced that there will be an advisory panel that will be put in place.

We need to review executive compensation right across the broader public sector. I think this is an issue that we simply must address. We must assure, as much as possible—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Member from Oxford, come to order.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: —that money is going to the front lines to serve patients and to serve the people of Ontario. So we are going to be attacking this issue, and I look forward to that—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Member from Halton, come to order.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: —across the health sector and well beyond.

CHILDREN'S SERVICES

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): New question? The member for Niagara Falls.

Mr. Kim Craitor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I know it's a long ways down here.

I'm pleased to ask a question directly to the Minister of Children and Youth Services. Minister, we know that life can be difficult for children with developmental, physical and communication disabilities. It can also be difficult for the families involved.

In my riding of Niagara Falls, Niagara-on-the-Lake and Fort Erie, I have met personally, and I hear from, the families who are dealing with these kinds of challenges. I must tell you, Minister, I'm always impressed with the parents' unrelenting commitment to their children. I will tell you, Minister, that these meetings, whether at my office or in their homes with the families, reinforce the need for important services that they need to receive from our government.

Mr. Speaker, can the minister please inform this House and the people of Ontario what our government is doing to help families in this kind of a situation?

Hon. Teresa Piruzza: Thank you to the member from Niagara Falls for this question and for the work that he does in his community, and the many conversations that we have had with respect to meetings that he's had in his riding.

My ministry provides a number of supports for children and families across the province through the children's treatment centres. In Windsor, we have the John McGivney centre, who I've met with and have toured. I know they do fantastic jobs for all children and youth dealing with disabilities. These centres provide rehabilitation services to children and youth with physical and developmental disabilities as well as chronic illness and communication disorders. This year, across the province, these treatment centres served over 64,000 children and youth.

Going forward, we will be making new targeted investments across the province with the goal of enhancing our services. We remain committed, of course, to providing the best services and programs for all our children and youth.

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The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Mr. Kim Craitor: Minister, I'm pleased to hear that children's treatment centres, like the one in our area, the Niagara Peninsula Children's Centre, are helping to bridge the gap between Ontario families and accessible services.

However, Minister, I have to tell you I have a concern about the availability and the access to services for Ontario children with special needs. Issues such as wait times for services can place huge stress on families, and these families tirelessly navigate the system in order to receive the best rehabilitation and care for their children. As well, I know that in rural and remote areas there are increased issues around accessibility.

In the minister's answer, she mentioned targeted investments. Can the minister please provide this House an update to where these investments are placed?

Hon. Teresa Piruzza: Thank you for the follow-up on that. We recognize there's always work to be done, and we all hear the same concerns. We remain committed to move forward on this.

I'm pleased to say that as part of this year's budget, my ministry announced an additional \$5-million investment to improve the services at these centres. This investment will not only reduce wait times in the province but also establish a new pilot program to get children better prepared for school. As well, this investment aims to better improve services in northern Ontario. It includes an expansion of the family-centred children's rehabilitation information system to five centres in the north. Last week, I had an opportunity to meet with a number of the directors from different treatment centres, and they're quite pleased with this investment and very happy to see it.

I'm proud that these new investments in this year's budget will help young people with special needs and their families across the province.

ACCESS TO INFORMATION

Ms. Sylvia Jones: My question is to the Attorney General. Minister, you're a lawyer. Can you tell us what happens to lawyers who destroy evidence while an investigation is taking place?

Hon. John Gerretsen: To the government House leader.

Hon. John Milloy: Again, I answer with a very simple question. For the last few days, we have been hearing from members of that party—and in particular the member from Nipissing, the member from Cambridge, other members, both in speeches and out here—talking about USB keys that were taken. Let me read what Madam Cavoukian's spokesperson has to say about the report that they keep citing: "It doesn't say in the report anything about files downloaded on to USB keys," Cavoukian spokesman Trell Huether said."

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Cambridge will come to order.

Carry on.

Hon. John Milloy: I'm sorry if I hit a nerve there, Mr. Speaker.

"She doesn't believe that happened and if she did, she would have put it in the report."

So I ask my honourable friend—we all recognize this is a serious matter. It is being looked into by the justice committee. Why will she not stand and apologize in her place and allow the committee—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Supplementary?

Ms. Sylvia Jones: Let me make it easy for you: You get disbarred. As the Attorney General, you have a unique position as the legal adviser in cabinet. In your ministry's own website, it outlines that you "shall see that the administration of public affairs is in accordance with the law."

Minister, the law's been broken. The OPP have been called in. You have clearly failed—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities, come to order.

Ms. Sylvia Jones: —in your duty to ensure your government has acted in accordance with the law.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop, please. Stop the clock.

The Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities probably didn't hear me say "stop" because he continued to talk.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Please finish.

Ms. Sylvia Jones: So I ask you, Attorney General, have you advised the Premier that justice must be done, that those who broke the law and knowingly destroyed evidence must be fired?

Hon. John Milloy: This is a serious matter. This is a very, very serious matter. The justice committee is looking into it. I understand they'll be hearing from witnesses this afternoon.

But it is time to deal with the facts. For the last few days, we've heard about these mythical USB keys, and here we have a statement from Madam Cavoukian saying she did not believe they existed.

The member from Nipissing yesterday told the Toronto Sun there were no emails from the Premier's office. The fact of the matter is, over 30,000 emails and documents from the Premier's office have been produced to the committee.

Mr. Speaker, it's time to start dealing with the facts. This is a serious matter. Let's let the committee do its work. In the interim, I think it's time for some apologies from that crowd across there.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Ms. Catherine Fife: My question is to the Minister of Economic Development, Trade and Employment. Minister, the Southwestern Ontario Development Fund was meant to create jobs in my region. The unemployment rate is nearing double digits in London and Windsor. The people of southwestern Ontario don't need a slush fund to benefit one political party. To make sure the money flowed to communities that really needed it and not just to connected friends, we, the NDP, amended Bill 13 to create an independent board to make decisions about the fund. Instead, the government played political games and didn't proclaim the independent board with royal assent.

When will the minister proclaim the entire bill, including the independent board, to guarantee southwestern Ontarians that their funds aren't being used to win by-elections?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: I appreciate the question. The member knows well—my ministry provided her with a briefing on this exact issue last week, I believe, and they're going to be meeting with a member of her staff later this week to discuss moving forward. Our intention,

of course, is to implement a process which provides the accountability, the accountability that already exists.

Unfortunately, last April 1, this fund was closed for a period of seven months, largely because the official opposition had various shenanigans and refused, ultimately, to support the bill. I appreciate the fact that the NDP did. If we had proclaimed that particular aspect, it would have meant that both the southwestern and eastern Ontario funds would have been closed for up to an additional one year. We weren't prepared to do that. We felt it was important to continue with accountability but flow the funds to those important businesses.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Catherine Fife: Minister, we understand that the ministry has a list of more than 20 companies approved for Southwestern Ontario Development Fund investment, but the minister is sitting on this list, and no one knows who they are.

It seems the minister is waiting until the by-elections to make announcements when it works for Liberals and not when it works for the companies who have been waiting for these funds and who want to create jobs in communities like London and Windsor.

This bill passed the Legislature in the final days of the Kitchener-Waterloo by-election. Seven months later, people in southwestern Ontario are still waiting for leadership.

Is the minister going to use these announcements to play politics in southwestern Ontario, or will the minister provide the list of the projects that have ministerial approval right now, today?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: There have been 22 projects approved so far. Three of those have been announced, two of those in the member from the official opposition who is my critic on economic development as well—important projects, not in a Liberal riding, but two of the three in a Conservative riding. The third one, in fact, is in the riding of the Speaker of this Legislature.

These are important funds that I know the member opposite recognizes.

Those additional projects haven't been announced because we're in that delicate stage of agreement and writing and signing the contracts between the two parties, between the government and the business.

For example, we've invested \$60 million in the Eastern Ontario Development Fund, and we've leveraged an additional almost \$600 million, retained almost 15,000 jobs.

I know the member opposite wouldn't want those two funds to be closed for a period of 18 months.

ENVIRONMENTAL RESEARCH

Mr. Bill Mauro: My question is for the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs. Minister, since its opening 45 years ago, the Experimental Lakes Area has garnered an international reputation for the research that takes place there. As we all know, it's largely free from the effects of industrial and human activity, allowing scientists to

conduct research on acid rain, water and ecosystem chemistry and helping us to better understand climate change and pollution.

Speaker, through you to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, can she please outline some of the benefits that the ELA brings to Ontario and why it's important that it continues to operate for the benefit of all Ontarians, especially those in northwestern Ontario?

Hon. Laurel C. Brotin: Thank you to the member for Thunder Bay-Atikokan for that question.

The Experimental Lakes Area is an incredibly important facility, and our government obviously sees the value in its continual operation. Over the past 45 years, the ELA has been able to provide a unique opportunity for scientists to conduct valuable research. The ELA has contributed to our understanding, through the long-term data collection of numerous hydrological, chemical and biological issues, and in keeping with its reputation as a world-renowned institution the ELA has collaborated with over 20 universities across Canada. The results and data collected from these experiments has made Ontario a leader in freshwater research.

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Our government's commitment to ensuring that these important experiments continue to be conducted will help us identify emerging threats to our environment and understand critical changes in ecological communities over time. I believe that that is something each and every Ontarian should be very proud of.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Bill Mauro: I want to thank the minister for her response and for underlining and restating the importance of the ELA to Ontario and to northwestern Ontario. But it really brings us to the point. Really, what that is is that there are still some significant concerns that are existing in terms of the long-term survival of the ELA.

I've got constituents who are asking me where the file is and what our government is doing to ensure the survival of the ELA. Just this week I received a letter from the Thunder Bay chapter of the Council of Canadians. I think other members in the Legislature received the same letter as well. They are expressing their reservations and concerns on this particular file.

Speaker, through you to the minister, could she outline for the House, for me and for my constituents what we're doing and what she is doing, in her capacity as the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, in her negotiations with the federal government to ensure the continued survival of the ELA?

Hon. Laurel C. Brotin: I'm happy to advise that the federal government and the IISD have reached a memorandum of understanding to continue operations of the ELA for 2013. It's an important step forward towards ensuring sustained, longer-term solutions for the facility's operations.

I was particularly pleased that the federal Department of Fisheries and Oceans has committed to the continuation of long-term data sets and to work with scientists to support their active ELA research this summer.

We acknowledge that a more permanent arrangement is necessary in order to protect this world-class research facility, and our government is continuing to work closely with Ottawa, the province of Manitoba and the IISD to achieve such an agreement.

In our 2013 budget tabled last month, our government reaffirmed its commitment to constructive dialogue with other provinces and the federal government, and the positive outcomes with respect to the ELA demonstrate that when you work together, good things can come to the province of Ontario.

SERVICES FOR THE DEVELOPMENTALLY DISABLED

Mr. Toby Barrett: My question is to the Minister of Community and Social Services. A month ago, I told you of a made-in-Ontario crisis after years of neglecting our developmentally disabled. A family from my riding, the Callaghans, visited Queen's Park that day. When their 20-year-old, severely disabled daughter, Anna, finishes her education this month there will be no supports. When I asked you if you would back the select committee on developmental disabilities to ensure that Anna, the Callaghans and other families across Ontario get the support they require, you said yes, as did the third party.

Minister, what happened? Where is that promised select committee?

Hon. Ted McMeekin: Well, I was more than pleased to support the motion from the honourable member. I did that in good faith. I assumed that her motion was put in good faith. It was passed by members of the House.

That having been said, it's not my responsibility nor your responsibility, nor the member who made the original motion's, to define the terms of any special committee—the membership, when it will meet and everything else. That job is quite properly one that's lodged with the three House leaders.

I look forward, as I suspect every member of this House does, to a resolution.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Toby Barrett: Minister, the Callaghans don't have the summer to wait. They need that committee struck today. The resolution you and your colleagues approved had timelines attached. They won't be met if you continue to drag your feet.

A month ago you told us that you were "proud to say ... that I will be delighted to support the motion." You said, "anything we can do together" to respond more appropriately to the most vulnerable folk that are there and need our help is good.

We have unanimous support. We've worked with our House leader. Why do we hear that you and the third party are balking? What happened to the NDP? What does House leader Gilles Bisson have to say about this? Minister, will you strike the committee today?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Thank you.
Minister.

Hon. Ted McMeekin: I surrender, and I confess. Mr. Speaker, I confess to having an abiding interest in moving forward in the context of serving those who have developmental challenges, and their families. That's why I stood in my place, as others did, and spoke, as I did, in support of the motion.

That having been said, you should take that issue up with your House leader and the other House leaders, to see if we can get this resolved.

ELEVATOR SAFETY

Mr. Taras Natyshak: My question is to the Minister of Government Services. Ontarians are increasingly worried about the threat to public safety due to the refusal of the National Elevator and Escalator Association to allow their qualified employees to work during contract negotiations.

According to the Toronto Star, replacement workers are being sent primarily to the financial district and not to priority buildings, such as hospitals and nursing homes. Office towers are reporting "business as usual" while seniors wait for urgent repairs in their care homes.

Why is this government allowing this employer to compromise public safety by directing employees to non-priority areas?

Hon. John Milloy: To the Minister of Consumer Services.

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: First, let me say, as the Minister of Consumer Services, that my number one priority is public safety. Our regulations in Ontario set very, very stringent safety requirements for elevating devices in Ontario.

I do understand that the strike is an ongoing concern of many, especially for those people who have accessibility issues. I can certainly relate to that. It's important to note that repairs can continue during the labour disruption, but they have to be done by qualified personnel, being qualified under the Technical Standards and Safety Authority.

As many know, the Technical Standards and Safety Authority is responsible for regulating elevating devices. I was very pleased to see a news release from TSSA just yesterday about enhanced enforcement action, stepping up the pace of inspections, prioritizing inspections to target high-risk elevators, reviewing shut-down policies to ensure that unsafe elevators do not pose a risk to safety, and increased investigation of reports of unqualified or uncertified technicians working on elevators. So I'm very—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

Just to let the member from Trinity-Spadina know, I got it.

Supplementary?

Mr. Taras Natyshak: My question is back to the Minister of Government Services. During this work stoppage, the legally required monthly safety checks of elevators across the province are not being carried out. The minister is standing idly by as every elevator in the

province lapses out of compliance with the government's own mandatory safety standards.

Will this government take immediate action to resume monthly safety checks and bring these elevators back into compliance?

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: I just want to share with the House again and reiterate that public safety is job one for me. I am not standing idly by at all. I'm monitoring the situation very closely, along with my colleague the Minister of Labour, who is actively watching this file. I understand the parties have been brought together numerous, numerous times, and I'm hopeful that we'll get a resolution.

Having said that, though, safety continues, and the TSSA is mandated to ensure that safety is job one. These inspections are increasing. As I said, they announced just yesterday they're increasing the pace of inspections, targeting high-risk elevators. They're also conducting an audit of elevators to ensure all work is done in strict compliance with safety regulations.

This is a very important issue for us. I'm monitoring the situation very, very closely. The important thing is, this is a very regulated industry, and only qualified repairs will continue.

RESEARCH AND INNOVATION

Ms. Soo Wong: My question is for the Minister of Research and Innovation. Our government has consistently supported and invested in Ontario's health care. Our budget will invest over \$3.5 billion in capital grants for hospitals. We will continue to support our small and rural hospitals, and our government will maintain Ontario's leadership in health care. To accomplish this, we will continue to invest in innovation and research in life sciences and technology.

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In my riding of Scarborough-Agincourt, I know of many young people, like George, June, Maggie, Jake, Raymond, Nadia, Anna and Rachel, who are currently studying life sciences at McMaster University or the University of Toronto. These young people are aware that our government can create the right environment to enable the health and technology sectors to make medical breakthroughs.

Through you, Speaker, to the Minister of Research and Innovation, what is the government doing to support innovation as it relates to health care?

Hon. Reza Moridi: I want to thank the member from Scarborough-Agincourt for the question. She is a strong advocate for the quality of health care services in our province.

Mr. Speaker, our government recognizes that innovation will help our province stay at the forefront of life sciences. Our track record in this area is strong: We have invested \$100 million in the Ontario Brain Institute to help conduct research into brain diseases; we have invested \$357 million to support the Ontario Institute for Cancer Research, a world leader in this area; and we have

committed approximately \$1.2 billion to support research through the Ontario Research Fund.

I am pleased to say our investments are supporting a better health care system and a higher quality of life for the people of Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Soo Wong: It's great to hear that our government is taking concrete action to push the boundaries of innovation and ensure the best health care possible.

Through our government's investments, Ontario is thriving in the research and innovation community and has accomplished tremendous advances in health care and medical technology. These advances will help improve the standard of care and the quality of life for Ontarians.

Our government also recognizes that an increase in investment in research and innovation will lead to an increase in economic opportunities and growth. Mr. Speaker, through you to the Minister of Research and Innovation, how will our government's investments in health facilitate broader economic growth and foster strong health care for future generations?

Hon. Reza Moridi: Again, I want to thank the member for that question. Here in Ontario, our health care sector has fueled economic growth. In fact, Ontario now has the largest life sciences community in Canada. Ontario is home for more than half of the country's life sciences economic activities.

Since 2003, our government has invested \$1.2 billion in the life sciences sector. These investments have helped to support over 2,100 projects in the province. We owe these economic successes to the great minds of Ontario's scientists, who are the leaders in the world in their fields, and also to the meaningful investments that our government has made in research and innovation in this province.

ONTARIO NORTHLAND TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION

Mr. Victor Fedeli: My question is for the Premier. Over a year ago, your government announced the fire sale of Ontario Northland. This Liberal document shows that it—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock. Order.

Put the question, please.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: This Liberal document shows the decision was made despite confidential advice to cabinet recommending that they wait for "further due diligence and analysis of fiscal and policy implications."

This new document shows exactly what those implications are, Speaker. Instead of saving the government \$265 million, which is in the budget, the sale will actually cost \$790 million.

Premier, you already know you're not going through with this sale. That would create your next billion-dollar scandal. So I'm asking you today, will you please stand

up before we break for the summer and tell the people of northern Ontario that the sale is off and let these people get on with their lives?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Finance.

Hon. Charles Sousa: The member opposite does bring up an issue of confidential information that was released to him, his party and the committee during the request of the justice committee. We've made it clear that some of this confidential information is out there. The valuations of the ONTC and the work that's being done for the public good and the public benefit are at risk because of some of the very issues he is now bringing forward. I would argue to all members: Be extremely cautious about confidential material that is being released.

Notwithstanding that, let me be clear: The treasury board, the finance committee, the ministries involved are doing their utmost to ensure that we provide proper valuation of the ONTC, that we recognize some of the challenges before us with regard to some of the employment and issues before the collective agreements and the notions out there.

We haven't made final decisions. What we are saying, though, is we're reviewing and assessing the impacts.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Victor Fedeli: So you got caught. These numbers expose your next billion-dollar scandal.

Let's review: Your announcement was made, and then the trouble in the north started. One of the largest companies in the north deferred a \$10-million expansion while waiting to determine if there's still a rail line. Unemployment rose in North Bay to 11.6% last month. This uncertainty is killing the marketplace, and it's tearing families apart, Speaker.

I'm going to give you the benefit of the doubt, Premier. You were told it's going to save \$265 million. I don't think you had any idea that it really was going to cost \$790 million. I believe that, Premier. It's a billion-dollar spread, but you learned of that gap when you became Premier.

So be the Premier today. Bring relief to northern families right now and tell them the sale is off.

Hon. Charles Sousa: Minister of Natural Resources.

Hon. David Orazietti: To the member opposite: Quite frankly, I don't think the member opposite had any idea of what this was going to cost either, and quite frankly, that's why we have not committed to doing this. I was with the Minister of Northern Development and Mines at the FONOM conference, and he quite clearly indicated that—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Order. Sit down. Come to order, please, member from Nipissing.

Hon. David Orazietti: Thank you, Speaker. The member opposite, quite frankly—here's what the member opposite was quoted as saying: "I can't tell you what you want to hear ... I can't say I'm opposed to privatization." The member opposite supported privatizing the ONTC without any idea of what would this would cost.

Our government has not made a commitment to do that. We want a transportation strategy that works for northerners, and that's exactly what we're going to deliver, Speaker.

PAN AM GAMES

Mr. Rosario Marchese: My question is to the Premier. When Ontario won the right to host the 2015 Pan Am Games four years ago, the people of Brampton were led to believe they would take part, and they built a brand new field hockey pitch. But last year, organizers of the games suddenly shut out Brampton and are now spending \$5.3 million in taxpayer money to cover the University of Toronto back campus with artificial turf, ruining one of the few remaining open green spaces in downtown Toronto.

Why are organizers building a field in Toronto, where there is fierce community opposition, instead of using the existing field in Brampton, where there is support?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Finance.

Hon. Charles Sousa: I do appreciate the opportunity to recognize the tremendous work that 2015 and the Pan Am committee are doing. You should know that a number of the venues that have been negotiated over the last little while have been under budget. This is going to provide a lot of opportunity for the surrounding communities in the greater Golden Horseshoe to provide a number of venues and sporting initiatives.

But the member talks about the options and availability that was made to the city of Brampton, who themselves declined to proceed on some of the very initiatives that we brought forward. That's a decision by council. But notwithstanding that, we do have venues. We have a great opportunity to promote Ontario in 2015. I congratulate them for what they're doing.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary? The member from Hamilton East-Stoney Creek.

Mr. Paul Miller: Speaker, actually the council does support it. The city of Brampton has put considerable resources into building the Cassie Campbell Community Centre field hockey pitch. Brampton now has the finest international-standard field hockey pitch in the greater Toronto area. This summer, they will host the Pan Am and Olympic qualifying international competition. If they can host the qualifying rounds, why can't they handle the games themselves?

The Brampton pitch is ready for international competition this summer. With the increased GO service heading their way, why is this government allowing TO2015 to waste taxpayers' money building another pitch in the Toronto core?

Hon. Charles Sousa: Mr. Speaker, the pitch that the member opposite speaks of is what was indicated. It's what we were trying to make happen. There were a number of revisions and amendments that were necessary in terms of the structure of that pitch. We brought it forward to the city of Brampton. They declined to proceed in that format, and that's their call. I appreciate that every com-

munity and every municipality wants to host some of these games, because it's a great, tremendous economic boost. It's also about culture and a great tourism to the community.

So we will continue to do a number of initiatives in the Brampton and Mississauga area, and we'll certainly do everything we can to promote Peel. We're going to do what's necessary right across the greater Golden Horsehoe because these games are about showing the world what Ontario has to offer and enabling us to really promote this great province and also nurture some great athletes right here in Ontario so that they can succeed right across the world. With everyone's help, we'll do just that.

LEGISLATIVE PAGES

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I know that all members will join me in saying thank you to the pages for staying for an extra two days, but this is their last day.

Applause.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): You did a good job. Well done.

Mr. Rob Leone: I hope you paid them overtime.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Triple time.

CORRECTION OF RECORD

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Cambridge on a point of order.

Interjection: Apologize.

Mr. Rob Leone: Certainly I'll apologize, but, Mr. Speaker, I would like to correct my record. Over the last couple of question periods, I referred to these USB keys. I should have referred to them, as the Information and Privacy Commissioner stated on page 24 of her report, Deleting Accountability, as "portable electronic devices." I guess this is a case of failed search terms, again, Mr. Speaker.

I apologize to the people of Ontario for dealing with this—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I find that that started out to be a point of order to correct the record and turned into something else. I'm disappointed that that took place.

The member from Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock on a point of order.

Ms. Laurie Scott: I think we'll have unanimous consent on the following. A letter was sent to the House leaders from the general government committee requesting that we meet over the summer to complete the review of the Aggregate Resources Act. So I ask for unanimous consent to allow the committee to meet over the summer to complete its important work on the Aggregate Resources Act since the Liberal and the NDP House leaders have refused so far, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock has asked for unani-

mous consent for the committee to meet over the summer. Do I have unanimous consent? I heard a no.

The member from Nepean–Carleton on a point of order.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: As a member of the Legislative Assembly committee, we have requested, via a letter through our Chair, Mr. Dunlop, to ask all the House leaders to permit us to meet at the discretion of the Chair during the months of July and August. I would like to seek unanimous consent so we're able to do our work.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member is seeking unanimous consent to meet. Do we have an agreement? I heard some noes.

There are no deferred votes. This House stands recessed until 3 p.m. this afternoon.

The House recessed from 1143 to 1500.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I don't know the gentleman's name, but I had a nice conversation with a gentleman from the United States who is visiting his daughter in London. He took the time to come and watch our Legislature.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Our deepest sympathies.

Ms. Catherine Fife: It's my pleasure to welcome Mr. Tom Schell from the Southwest Economic Alliance to Queen's Park today to talk about food.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

RENEWABLE ENERGY

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: I rise today, on the last day of this legislative session, to give the Premier one more opportunity to apologize to rural Ontario.

Premier, you need to apologize for telling municipalities who have declared themselves unwilling hosts of your industrial wind turbines that they are likely out of luck, given your government's May 30 announcement.

All municipalities want to do is stand up for their communities and constituents, but your government continues with a "we know best" attitude.

Premier, it's an insult to municipalities if you actually thought that they would buy into your announcement. Not only has your government lost the confidence of the municipalities and their constituents, but you've also lost the confidence of energy proponents.

The renewable energy industry is confused. They don't know what is next. They're confused with the approvals process, and they simply do not know where your government is heading.

The bottom line is, you know you passed your Green Energy Act too fast, without the proper consultation and without a proper business and fiscal plan. The PC caucus knows it, municipalities know it, ratepayers know it, and

proponents know it. In the end, ratepayers are stuck paying for your unaffordable green energy scheme that you know isn't working. It'll result in another 40% to 60% rate increase.

Premier, your ability to stick ratepayers with your costly energy scandals and schemes is appalling. Do the honourable thing: Apologize to unwilling host communities and take back your comments that they are likely out of luck and out of time.

STEEL INDUSTRY

Mr. Paul Miller: US Steel continues its heavy-handed treatment of hard-working unionized Steelworkers at its Hamilton Hilton Works and Nanticoke sites. It seems determined to drive workers to despair and ruin, while taking our raw materials to process in the United States.

Union-busting clearly is the American conglomerate's main objective, and this government has brought in absolutely no protection for these workers.

My colleague the NDP member from Essex tabled Bill 113 during the last session, in response to increasingly aggressive management bargaining tactics at Caterpillar, US Steel, Inco and other companies. The bill provides that where certain private sector collective agreements have expired and a strike or lockout has reached more than 180 days, either party may ask the Ontario Labour Relations Board to settle the provisions of a new collective agreement by binding arbitration. The board may only direct binding arbitration if the board determines that the party making the application is bargaining in good faith and that a new collective agreement is unlikely to be conducted within 30 days of continued bargaining. The bill provides that when the board notifies the parties of its direction to settle the provisions of a collective agreement, the employees shall end the strike or the employer shall end the lockout.

The bill makes sense, but still the Liberal group across the chamber has left Steelworkers without the most basic protection of their jobs, wages, their severance, or their ability to bargain a good collective agreement.

These Steelworkers need this government to step in and require that the bargaining process available through binding arbitration at the Ontario Labour Relations Board is enforced.

ONTARIO CRAFT BEER WEEK

Ms. Helena Jaczek: Next week, the Ontario Craft Brewers, consisting of 32 members, will be hosting their fourth annual Ontario Craft Beer Week, which will feature over 150 events in over 50 communities throughout the province from June 15 to 23. The week-long festival is designed to expose Ontarians to the wonders of craft beer through tasting events, brewery tours, cooking demonstrations, food pairings, beer dinners, music nights, brewery collaborations, exciting online contests and much more.

I would be remiss in not mentioning that one of the most distinguished members of the Ontario Craft

Brewers is King Brewery, located in my great riding of Oak Ridges—Markham. King Brewery has a tradition for excellence. It recently won a gold medal in the Kellerbier category and a bronze medal in the Bock—Traditional German Style category at the 2013 Canadian Brewing Awards.

King Brewery has also gained a global reputation for having high-quality and great-tasting craft beer. In 2012, it won three silver medals at the world beer championships for its Pilsner, Vienna lager and dark lager.

I know my colleagues feel similarly proud of their local products, so this summer I urge you all to explore some of the 200-plus different kinds of beers offered by Ontario craft breweries. But please be safe, drink responsibly and do not drink and drive.

EAST WELLINGTON FAMILY HEALTH TEAM

Mr. Ted Arnott: The East Wellington Family Health Team has been an outstanding health care success story in Wellington—Halton Hills, providing health services to residents in the Erin, Rockwood and Acton areas. I've been very pleased to work with this organization and their compassionate, professional staff, supporting them in any way I can.

Recently, I received word from the East Wellington Family Health Team that they're seeking to establish a laboratory service on site, as well as diagnostic imaging services. I want to offer my unqualified support for this idea.

Right now, our local residents in these underserved communities must travel up to 47 kilometres and wait many long hours for lab services. Our seniors and people with chronic conditions like diabetes deserve better. Granting a new specimen collection centre licence for the East Wellington Family Health Team would improve health service for the local and surrounding population, facilitate the recruitment and retention of physicians in our area, support our health professionals in implementing the ministry's preventive care initiatives, give patients an alternative to waiting at the local hospital emergency department and provide care for seniors closer to home.

I call upon the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care to review the need for lab and diagnostic imaging services in the east Wellington area and provide the necessary approvals without delay.

SEXUAL ASSAULT

Ms. Catherine Fife: I'd like to take this opportunity to highlight a meeting I had last month with the Sexual Assault Support Centre of Waterloo Region. I toured their incredibly welcoming facility and saw the important work that they do to support victims of sexual assault. Sexual assault affects people of every age and cultural background and has devastating impacts on individuals, families and communities. It touches every aspect of our lives.

One in three women will experience some form of sexual assault in their lifetime. The economic cost of violence against women across Canada is in the billions of dollars. This includes the cost of health, criminal justice and social services, as well as lost productivity.

In 2011, the Ontario government introduced a Sexual Violence Action Plan that was supposed to increase financial support for Ontario's 41 under-resourced sexual assault centres. Unfortunately, the increase was less than 6% for only four years. This funding will expire on March 31, 2015. These centres are already stretched beyond capacity. Women seeking individual counselling in Waterloo region are facing a wait-list of almost seven months; it is worse in other communities.

Ontario needs to commit to investing in both support services for survivors of sexual violence and public education campaigns aimed at prevention. We can give survivors of sexual assault hope and a chance to heal. We can instill hope in Ontarians that sexual violence is not inevitable. Through public education, social change is possible and a better future exists for our daughters and our sons.

LONG-TERM CARE

Mr. Bill Mauro: A couple of weeks ago in this chamber I had an opportunity to talk about the opening of the Leila Greco centre in my riding of Thunder Bay-Atikokan, a brand new facility—132 supportive housing units that will greatly help provide a great level of care to seniors in my riding and also relieve some of the ALC pressure from our hospital, Thunder Bay regional.

Just recently, as part of that, there is a seniors' centre of excellence and integrated services—a whole project. We just did the groundbreaking on the second phase of that one or two weeks ago—that's also in my riding of Thunder Bay-Atikokan—on the same piece of land. What that is: There's going to be a brand new long-term-care home for the seniors in Thunder Bay and northwestern Ontario. This home will accommodate 416 beds. As I said, it will be on the same property. We're going to have the supportive housing unit piece over here, and right beside it, just beginning construction, there's going to be a brand new long-term-care home representing 416 brand new beds.

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St. Joe's Care Group in our riding is an incredible partner. We're fortunate to have them in Thunder Bay-Atikokan. They will be the service provider for the seniors. They've got a tremendous long-term reputation of providing great care for seniors in Thunder Bay—and all across the north, I would say. They do great work. We're lucky to have them. We're thankful to have them as a partner.

The project is a \$100-million construction project in its complete scope, including the Leila Greco component, as well as long-term care: great for our seniors, great for quality health care and great for the construction building trades.

BOOKLORE

Ms. Sylvia Jones: I'm pleased to rise today and congratulate my favourite independent bookstore, BookLore, on being named the Canadian Bookseller of the Year at the 2013 Libris Awards, held last week in Toronto.

Nancy Frater, the owner of BookLore, is proud to feature local and Canadian writers by hosting many book launches and promoting authors who are from our own community. As an independent bookseller, Nancy understands the importance of providing opportunities for Canadian writers to find their audience.

As a businesswoman, Nancy is very generous with her time, mentoring other businesspeople, and is a leading contributor to the arts. Nancy is the founder of the Armchairs and Authors event at the annual Headwaters Arts Festival, an event that has helped book aficionados and authors celebrate Canadian works.

I'm pleased to see BookLore being recognized by the Canadian bookseller community. The Libris Awards highlight excellence in book retailing, superior customer service and innovation, marketing innovations, author promotion and community involvement. BookLore excels in all of these categories.

I extend my congratulations to Nancy and to the entire staff at BookLore. Thank you for being a wonderful promoter of our local writers and our business community.

LORI SYNES-TARABA

Mr. Kim Craitor: Today, I honour a constituent of mine, Lori Synes-Taraba of Niagara Falls, for her incredible strength and tenacity. Lori was recently awarded the 2013 Canadian Cancer Society's national Medal of Courage for caregiving and advocacy during the inaugural Impact Awards, which recognize an individual's exceptional commitment to fight against cancer and is the society's highest volunteer award.

Lori began volunteering after her son Brock was diagnosed and then survived an aggressive cancer at the tender age of 10 months. He's now 15.

Since 2004, Laurie has been involved in many aspects of the society and is passionate about the Canadian Cancer Society and helps in any way she can. For example, she participated in numerous initiatives, including several local committees and the Ontario Public Issues Team, and has been at Queen's Park for MPP education days. I'm sure many of the members remember meeting with her.

For the last several years, Lori has been assisting the national Public Issues Team on new policies, and was the voice of patients during a national caregiver media campaign last year.

Lori doesn't hesitate to share her son's story, hoping to encourage others to fund research and fight back. She continues to volunteer, and she works tirelessly for the eradication of the disease. Her courage continues to be an inspiration to all who meet her.

Mr. Speaker, as a cancer survivor, I tell you, Lori is a very special lady. She's an inspiration. I know she's watching. Lori, to you: I send you my love and my hugs and kisses.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): That's allowed.

WIND TURBINES

Ms. Laurie Scott: The proposal to erect two industrial wind turbines at Sumac Ridge in my riding of Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock has now gone through the public comment period and is awaiting the decision of the Minister of the Environment.

The community has been fighting this for four years through public rallies, open houses, letter writing and postings to the EBR. The municipality of the city of Kawartha Lakes has made its opposition abundantly clear. No one could possibly have missed the point that this is not a willing host community. However, the government has said that it will only use the "willing host" criteria for future applications. Mr. Speaker, if ignoring the concerns of the community weren't enough, the Sumac Ridge turbine proposal would be built on the Oak Ridges moraine.

The Minister of the Environment seems to believe that only he knows what is best for Ontario's environment, yet he turned a blind eye in 2009 with the passage of Bill 150, which amended the Green Energy Act to permit industrial wind turbines to be erected on the Niagara Escarpment. Is the environment minister's normally zealous piety going to be again muted by approving the building of industrial wind turbines on one of the Ontario's most environmentally sensitive areas? Is blind loyalty to his government ideological agenda really more important than protecting the environment?

I would ask the Minister of the Environment to stand up for the people on the Oak Ridges moraine and the area and turn down the Sumac Ridge application before it is too late.

SPECIAL REPORT, OMBUDSMAN

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I beg to inform the House that I have today laid upon the table a report from the Ombudsman of Ontario respecting his investigation into the Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional Services' response to allegations of excessive use of force against inmates.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON FINANCE AND ECONOMIC AFFAIRS

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: I beg leave to present a report from the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs and move its adoption.

The Clerk-at-the-Table (Ms. Tonia Grannum): Your committee begs to report the following bill as amended:

Bill 65, An Act to implement Budget measures and to enact and amend various Acts / Projet de loi 65, Loi visant à mettre en œuvre les mesures budgétaires et à édicter et à modifier diverses lois.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Shall the report be received and adopted? Agreed? Agreed.

Report adopted.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Pursuant to the order of the House dated June 5, 2013, this bill is ordered for third reading.

PROSPEROUS AND FAIR ONTARIO ACT (BUDGET MEASURES), 2013

LOI DE 2013 POUR UN ONTARIO PROSPÈRE ET ÉQUITABLE (MESURES BUDGÉTAIRES)

Mr. Sousa moved third reading of the following bill:

Bill 65, An Act to implement Budget measures and to enact and amend various Acts / Projet de loi 65, Loi visant à mettre en œuvre les mesures budgétaires et à édicter et à modifier diverses lois.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The Minister of Finance.

Hon. Charles Sousa: Mr. Speaker, the 2013 Ontario budget lays out our plan for a prosperous and fair Ontario. It's about making smart, strategic investments to strengthen our economy, help create jobs and take action to eliminate the deficit by 2017-18.

Mr. Speaker, we looked at and we took a collaborative approach to building this plan. We held 12 jobs round tables with private sector, labour, education and training partners, and we hosted pre-budget consultations with over 1,000 organizations and reached out to over 600,000 households in communities across Ontario, because we believe that everyone, and every region and community, has a stake in Ontario's economic framework for jobs and growth. I urge all members of the House to support our plan for a balanced approach to help all people in Ontario succeed.

Ontario's economy is growing and creating jobs, despite a challenging global environment. In fact, in May the province gained more than 50,000 jobs. That included an increase in youth employment of more than 20,000 jobs.

We know that Ontario's economic fundamentals are strong, and Ontario remains an attractive place in which to live, work and invest. But we know there's still work to do. Since last year's budget, expectations for global economic growth have weakened, and global uncertainty persists, especially in Europe. So we're working with key partners to lay out a six-part economic plan to help Ontario's economy seize new opportunities for growth and job creation.

Of course, eliminating the deficit is crucial to this plan. Balancing the books is essential to building greater

confidence in the investment community and capital markets. Our efforts as a government are best focused on creating a favourable economic environment, because when businesses and entrepreneurs take risks and make investments, Ontario's economy grows and creates jobs. That's why our budget includes a six-point economic plan for jobs and growth. Our plan focuses on:

(1) Supporting a competitive business climate. We believe that—working together—businesses, labour and government can drive change and move to a more outward-looking and innovative economy.

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(2) Investing in modern infrastructure: We would provide more than \$35 billion for infrastructure investments over the next three years.

(3) Investing in a highly skilled workforce: We would build on our previous achievements and create a youth job strategy to invest \$295 million over two years to promote employment opportunities—

Mr. John O'Toole: Point of order.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Yes?

Mr. John O'Toole: Yes, through you, Madam Speaker: Standing order 79, when we had a programming motion here, says that: "Bills reported from the Committee of the Whole House shall stand ordered for third reading. Bills reported from standing or select committees shall be ordered for third reading unless the minister or parliamentary assistant directs that they be referred to the Committee of the Whole House."

This is section (b), which is the important part: "When a bill has been amended in any committee it shall be reprinted as the Clerk of the House directs, amendments being indicated, and shall not be further proceeded with until it has been reprinted and marked."

I'm asking for clarification—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Thank you. I'll provide you with a clarification. Very clearly at the beginning, it says, "That, notwithstanding any standing order." Thank you.

Please continue.

Hon. Charles Sousa: Well, Madam Speaker, I think what's before us is even more important than tactics like that.

We would need, and we want to continue in our focused plan. We were talking about a skilled workforce. We would build on our previous achievements and create a youth job strategy to invest \$295 million over two years to promote employment opportunities, entrepreneurship and innovation for our youth.

(4) Promoting entrepreneurship and innovation: We would build on our efforts to support a climate in which more Ontario businesses could transform ideas into innovative goods and services for global markets.

(5) Going global: We would work with businesses to promote Ontario's many export industry strengths. We have a number of multicultural communities. We have emerging markets in the world. We need to tap into that opportunity. That's why we're looking at over 60 trade missions abroad.

(6) Supporting vibrant and strong communities. We would continue to work with municipalities and local industries to help them take advantage of emerging opportunities for jobs and growth.

Madam Speaker, this is about promoting opportunities. It's not more government. It's about encouraging more businesses to stimulate their economic growth for them to continue to make those investments and create those jobs in the private sector. Over 450,000 net new jobs have been created thus far since the recession. That is our plan for jobs and growth.

Now I'd like to talk briefly about our plan to increase prosperity and build a more fair society. Ontario's economic performance and social fabric become even stronger when everyone has the opportunity to succeed and at their full potential.

A fair society is one where everyone has access to high-quality public services and where all children and youth have access to a good education. A fair society means ensuring the cost of public services does not lead to an unsustainable financial burden for future generations. It means addressing poverty. It means transforming social assistance to increase opportunities for everyone to participate in the workforce. It means working with First Nation communities and with other aboriginal groups to ensure their needs are properly understood and addressed. It means supporting Ontario's most vulnerable so that they can be more fully involved and participate in their communities. It means supporting options for people to save for retirement so that they can retire with peace of mind.

Madam Speaker, I'd now like to talk about Ontario's path to balance. We are committed to eliminating the deficit by 2017-18 in a way that is both fiscally responsible and fair. We have already been able to demonstrate significant progress. The deficit for 2012-13, the fiscal year just ended, is now estimated to be \$9.8 billion; that is a \$5-billion improvement compared with the 2012 budget forecast. This marks the fourth year in a row that we have reported a deficit lower than forecast, making us the only government in Canada to achieve this level of success. We are currently one of only two governments in Canada that is on track to beat our fiscal targets for 2012-13.

Our plan for eliminating the deficit is to manage spending effectively. Growth in program spending is projected to be less than 1% in 2012-13 for the second consecutive year. The majority of ministries, including health and education, contained growth in spending and managed well below their 2012-13 budgets. Ontario currently has the lowest program spending per capita among all Canadian provinces and governments.

We know that achieving our spending targets will require some difficult choices. Across-the-board cuts would hurt public services and undermine programs that are providing high-quality services to the public, such as health care and education. Instead, we would continue a careful review of spending to determine which programs should be enhanced or reduced. We would continue to

consult with the public after this budget, because engaging the people of Ontario on the future of their public services requires an ongoing dialogue.

The 2013 budget is our plan to create a prosperous and fair Ontario. As we move forward through a sensitive economic recovery, we propose taking a balanced approach. Our approach would allow us to make smart investments in Ontario's long-term prosperity while balancing the budget. Our approach would help protect public services, including schools and hospitals, and our approach would help Ontario seize opportunities to create jobs here at home.

This is Ontario's budget, developed by input of many Ontarians; over 600,000 were involved. This is all about creating jobs and helping people in their everyday lives.

Madam Speaker, once again, I urge all members of this House to support our plan to strengthen the economy and build a prosperous and fair Ontario for all. We all have a duty and responsibility in this House. This budget is an economic plan and a framework that speaks to the needs and the requirements of our people and the public.

All of us have a responsibility to stand together in this minority government to work together for the benefit of the people of Ontario, not as a result of partisan issues. These are not election-cycle-politics decisions; these are decisions that affect our long-term prosperity and future generations of this province. I encourage everyone to support the budget.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further debate?

Mr. Peter Shurman: I would like to start with the customary, "I am pleased to participate in this debate," but what I will say is that we've come to the end of a long—and, I might say, tedious and misunderstood—process. I will also call it a disappointing process for me, but much more importantly, a very disappointing process for the province of Ontario.

I want to make something absolutely clear from the outset: Ontario Progressive Conservatives are against this government and we are voting against this government. It was never about a budget; it was about a government and an approach to budgets and budgeting generally.

This is the 10th budget of this government. We have never seen promises made and promises kept, and there was never a reason why we should have believed it of them this time, and we have not been surprised. That is where we were when our leader, Tim Hudak, announced that we would not be supporting this bill. Nothing has changed.

The New Democratic Party said that they believed in collaboration, that we should believe in collaboration. The NDP got it wrong, and the history of the last several months has proven that. The Liberals have created the largest debt and annual deficits in our province's history throughout their 10 years in power, and now their accomplices, the NDP, have vacated their own self-proclaimed moral high ground and thrown away the moral compass of their own design to join the Liberals down in the muck. That is precisely why people, when

you talk to them, say, "All politicians are the same." It just ain't so.

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Ontario's debt has doubled from \$139 billion in 2003 to \$273 billion in 2013. This debt is set to triple. Debtor-person has gone up by \$9,000 to \$21,000 for every man, woman and child. Every once in a while, you say to yourself, "Look around and ask yourself, 'Who cares?'" Not the Liberals. Not the NDP. Well, everyone else should care. Why should they care? Because we are talking, as the finance minister was, about stability within a province, a province that has been devoid of stability for a number of years now, a province that under this regime, propped up by the NDP, will not see the implementation of anything stable because, notwithstanding his protestations, this finance minister and this government cannot bring the budget into balance in the time frame they have set for themselves or anything remotely resembling that. They're caught up in a web of their own making.

We have witnessed, over the course of most of the past year, a government hamstrung by yet another scandal of its own making. I'm talking about the power plant fiasco—the illegal email cover-up. How did this begin?

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): I'd ask members, if they have conversations, to take them out of the chamber.

Continue.

Mr. Peter Shurman: Thank you, Speaker. This began, I want to remind everybody, with a legitimate request in the estimates committee for information that the people of Ontario own, by a legitimate party and legitimate representatives of it asking for it. That's all it was. We've had every kind of can and brick and boulder stuck in front of the bus every step of the way, and we still do. We will adjourn today; we'll come back in the fall, and this is not going away. It follows on what?—eHealth and Ornge and eco fees and God knows what else. This is a government that has lost the moral authority to govern, and it's a government that's being propped up by a party that wants to tell you it represents the moral compass of Ontario when there is anything but the truth in that statement.

Until now, I always thought the NDP had stood firmly on its principles. There was a standing joke that I heard probably the first week I ever spent in this Legislature. NDP and Progressive Conservatives members share the same anteroom—lobby—outside this chamber, and they used to say to us, "Well, we don't agree on very much, but we do agree on this: Our party and your party have principles, which makes us different and in common from the Liberals." That's what they used to say. That's gone.

This is a party—the one I represent—that has presented a plan, a legitimate plan for how Ontario can be put back on the right footing. We've taken great pains to do it over the course of the past year and a half—presented

12 white papers. Do they represent the sum total of everything we want to do or think should be done? Of course not; that's not the nature of white papers. But they represent a lot of things that could be done, and from them, in true consultative fashion, our party has come to conclusions that we will take into the next election and that will be a plan for Ontario to put it right.

So now what we've got is an NDP that hides under the guise of collaboration in order to what they say will advance Ontario. The only thing this budget, supported by the NDP, is going to do is hurt Ontario. The NDP has become somewhat drunk on being the power broker, and the loss for that proclivity will be dear.

It was shocking to me—shocking—that the third party voted in favour of second reading of this budget on the very same day that the privacy commissioner released her report on the fact that this government committed an illegal act as it intentionally withheld and destroyed information and then covered it up. That's the day they voted for second reading on this. This is arguably the biggest scandal yet in the history of the province of Ontario, in terms of the size and scope of dollars wasted—the dollars spent—notwithstanding eHealth and Ornge. The third party complains in this House every single day in this House about a scandal-plagued government and how it's driving Ontario into the ground. This is the ultimate pot calling the kettle black. That can now be said, because the NDP is the enabler. The party that wants to end unemployment assists in the proliferation of unemployment. "Let's help young people," they say. "Let's get \$195 million to engineer a youth employment program." Instead, this government gives them \$295 million. My attitude is: a great idea taken in singularity.

A budget is not about singularity. We have 500,000-plus people in Ontario—not necessarily youth; all kinds of people—and every one of them deserves the opportunity to work. Why single that out? Why? Because that's on the agenda of the NDP and, hey, if you're Kathleen Wynne and the Liberals, "Let's just give it to them."

Now here they are, propping up the Liberals to put their own selfish ends first. That's what the NDP has become: selfish. They say it's about collaboration—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Order. I asked you to take conversations outside the chamber.

Continue.

Mr. Peter Shurman: They say it's about collaboration. They say it's a desire of the citizens and it reflects their wish not to go to the polls. What utter nonsense. If you know anything about Ontarians, Ontarians will tell you that they hate to go to the polls on actual scheduled election days. Ontarians don't like to vote. Don't take my word for it; look at the voter turnout. It's about 50%—less, in some ridings. So it's not about whether we want to go out and vote or whether Ontarians like to go out and vote; it's about the legitimization of a government that needs to become legitimate, because, Speaker, right now, it's not.

The NDP's laundry list of demands will cost an additional \$1 billion annually in new spending initiatives. Where will this price for peace come from? That's money that is not going to expand health care; it's not going to build subways; it's not going to create jobs.

Build subways indeed: I might say a few words on that. Liberals say it'll take revenue tools. Even the NDP is against that. Revenue tools? Why don't we call it what it is? Taxes. The Liberals and the NDP are both fully accountable for the financial disaster and kicking the can down the road for future generations. I said it, Speaker, and I'll say it again: \$21,000 on the back of every single Ontarian, including the babies being born in hospitals around Ontario today. The NDP's hands are now directly tied to the downward spiral of this province's economy. Let them know it and let every Ontarian know it.

The deficit, 2010: \$14 billion; 2011: \$13 billion; 2012: a contrived deficit of \$9.8 billion, and I can say why it was contrived. Take the amount of money you saved in dealing with teachers, take accounting movements by using reserve funds, and you can make it look like anything. What's the proof point: 2013, this budget we're discussing today, an increased deficit of \$11.7 billion. The finance minister has the audacity to stand here and say that he's going to give us a balanced budget by fiscal 2017-18.

Between 2010 and 2012, revenue increased by \$7 billion, despite the deficit decreasing by only \$4.2 billion. Isn't that amazing? The Minister of Finance touts that the deficit has improved by \$5 billion. As I said, it isn't so. It's just fun with figures. He neglects to say that there are largely one-time savings, and those include \$1.5 billion from reducing liabilities associated with public sector sick day banking. Speaking of sick day banking, how about the new arrangements with teachers? How do you think that's working out? I understand that there's an awful lot of absenteeism on Monday and Friday. Put two and two together: I say that to Ontarians. All of the major ministries will see government spending increase over the next two years: health, education, post-secondary, social services, justice. The cost breakdown of the NDP demands: Take one thing alone, a 15% auto insurance cut. Fifteen per cent auto insurance—

Interjections.

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Mr. Peter Shurman: Listen to them applaud. How is it going to be achieved? By instructing FSCO to order the insurance industry to reduce costs by 15%. Hey, I would love to have my insurance reduced by 15%.

Do you know what happens with an insurance company or any other company that can't make a profit anymore? It stops selling what it ordinarily sells. So watch what happens in the insurance industry in the province of Ontario.

The big question still remains: How will they balance the budget on time and on schedule?

Let's talk about the Financial Accountability Office. This something that the NDP is touting.

Interjection.

Mr. Peter Shurman: Go ahead, applaud that one. Why don't I read into the record a couple of paragraphs from Christina Blizzard's column of today? She says:

"I'm not buying any of it."

"I'm not buying former Premier Dalton McGuinty's argument that he didn't know his staff had deleted all their emails.

"I'm not buying Andrea Horwath's fake outrage over the emails—only to watch her prop up this scandal-plagued government.

"The NDP leader was in defensive mode Monday, saying her party got a 'Financial Accountability Office' out of their support for the budget bill.

"Well, isn't that nice?

"If we had politicians with integrity, with a shred of honesty, we wouldn't need to send good money after bad by paying for someone to come in and keep them accountable.

"Who gave Horwath control of the budget anyway?

"She's a co-conspirator, along with Premier Kathleen Wynne, in putting forward a budget that will add \$40 billion to the debt over the next two years.

"That's unacceptable."

Look, a Financial Accountability Office? Speaker, I'm the Financial Accountability Office.

Interjection: Hear, hear.

Mr. Peter Shurman: My friend from Oxford is the Financial Accountability Office. My friend from Leeds-Grenville is the Financial Accountability Office. That's why there is an opposition. That's why there's a third party. They haven't got it straight.

How is the Financial Accountability Office going to stop people from receiving chemo drugs that are at half strength? How is the Financial Accountability Office going to stop a government from going out and spending—who knows?—a billion dollars to cancel the construction of power plants for political ends? A Financial Accountability Office can look at it forensically after the fact. It's political action that comes from the other side that keeps people in check. That's how it works.

You want to cut auto insurance by 15%? I'll tell you how: Cut fraud by \$1.5 billion. The auto insurance clause within the budget itself really comes down to what lawyers would describe as best efforts. That's what it is: best efforts. We all know, because although not all of us are lawyers, we have enough to do with legalese in this place to know, that "best efforts" means, "Hey, we'll try, but if we don't get there, sorry about that." I have news for you: They're not going to get there. The fraud in this system is what costs us that extra \$1.5 billion.

Since the beginning of the almost 10 years of Liberal tenure, revenue has increased by \$42 billion. That means that they're taxing every Ontarian more. You didn't know? And you're getting less. You didn't know? How is your electricity bill doing? But spending has increased by over \$48 billion. Increasing our deficit next year: This is not a sign to investors to come to Ontario.

When we talk about balanced budgets, what we're really talking about is sending a signal. A balanced

budget says to an investor, "It's okay to spend your money. This is a good place to be." A balanced budget says to a business person or to a board, "It's time to unlock the vault. You've got billions in the bank. Let's put it in the ground and build a new plant." "It's time for companies to expand their workforces and hire some of those 500,000 out-of-work people."

Over 50% of all Ontario government program spending right now goes to public sector labour costs. One of Premier Wynne's first moves? Wynne immediately increased spending when she took office by expanding the size of government and creating new ministries. A wage freeze? Not in the Liberal ranks.

Have you heard, Speaker, of the new elite? This is basically how Maclean's magazine, in a recent article, described the broader public sector: the new elite, people who have a remnant of the past, a defined benefit compensation plan, a defined benefit pension plan that lets you retire sometime in your fifties with somewhere between 60% and 75% of your salary. Who is paying for that? Every single Ontarian, and I include in that the 70% who have no pension benefit whatsoever. They're going to work till the day they die.

Interjection: That's us.

Mr. Peter Shurman: That's us. Public sector compensation at this point now exceeds that of the private sector by 14%. The 27% number that I've quoted in this Legislature before is the overall advantage when you factor in pensions and health and overall benefits. The new public sector elite is getting national media coverage from Maclean's magazine. The sunshine list increased by 11% in 2011, and another 11% in 2012; 8,823 people in 2012 made it on to that list anew. And what's Premier Wynne's solution? She wanted to raise the \$100,000 threshold for the sunshine list to \$150,000 so there wouldn't be so many people on it.

Let me read something else into the record before I defer to a colleague. This is from the National Post. Scott Stinson wrote an article entitled—this is also today—"Ontario Liberals Suddenly Find Cash for Unions." It says, "A week after the LCBO averted a Victoria Day-weekend strike by offering workers \$800-'signing bonuses'—the nakedly euphemistic term for a pay increase that is not, technically, a wage increase—another of Ontario's arm's-length agencies, Ontario Lottery and Gaming Corp., avoided a work stoppage at the Woodbine slots facility. OLG, too, made it happen by proposing a last-minute offer that included \$600 lump-sum payments in each of the first two years and a 1.95% wage increase in the third year."

Concluding: "So, the found money at the liquor monopoly led to found money at the gambling monopoly, and there can be little doubt that the unions representing all those other workers who agreed to two-year wage freezes in the last year of the McGuinty government watched all of this with interest."

That means we know what's coming, because we have a situation in the province of Ontario where there are 4,000 collective agreements, and as I said in this House,

when the teachers' settlements were announced about eight weeks ago, expect every one of those people to get in line and ask for their entitlements because they believe that they're entitled to their entitlements. The Premier herself said in this House on March 4, "We've been very clear that constraining public sector wages is part of what we are doing and will continue to do. That's why we're on target. The Drummond report said that if we didn't take those measures, if we didn't work to constrain costs, then we would not be able to balance the budget."

I have a piece of news: This quote is accurate, but the Liberals have taken absolutely no steps to advance this, and what we've talked about here demonstrates that they're taking steps that are quite the reverse.

Ontario is feeling the repercussions and the full cost of collapsing to unions for the past—I was going to say “nine and a half years,” but Speaker, it’s going to be 10 years in October. There is no transparency in these union arbitration deals. The budget doesn’t give any more clarity on the full cost of these backroom negotiations. We’re just in problems.

I’ll give you a quick personal story on the LCBO deal. I went in last week because I, too, was afraid that, for the long weekend in May—I guess it’s two weeks ago now—I’d better make sure that the Shurman family sipping wine was in stock, and so I bought a case of that particular wine at my local LCBO. On the way out, I said to the clerk, “Did you receive your signing bonus yet?” She said, “Oh, the signing bonus is not enough money. After all, they’re going to take taxes off it and by the time I have it, it’ll probably be \$300 or \$400.” That’s the grace that we get from people who have gotten wage increases from a government that said it was going to hold the line at zero.

In conclusion, let me go back to where I started. We are not voting against the budget; we’re voting against a bill. But let it be clear: We are voting against a party—no, two parties that have taken Ontario down the wrong path in the face of a party that has a plan. We’re voting against a government and its accomplice.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further debate?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: It’s my pleasure to rise and provide some comments for the New Democrats in today’s debate on the programming motion or the final budget vote, whatever we want to call it. But before I actually get into my more formal remarks, I want to take a moment to stop and congratulate my fantastic team of NDP MPPs who have done such a great job over the last couple of weeks. We’ve got a very hard-working caucus team, and we are very, very proud of the work we’ve been able to do on behalf of Ontarians, because what we were able to do is achieve real results for the people of this province over the last several weeks.

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What does that look like? I think, first and foremost, that it looks like a Financial Accountability Office. If there’s one thing that’s become very apparent over the last number of months—and years, frankly—it’s that this

province needs that tool, that ability to look at what the government is proposing and make sure that the figures and facts are actually true, as opposed to simply government spin and Enron accounting tricks. What we’ve decided to do through this process is make sure that, with this Financial Accountability Office, the people of this province today—well, maybe not today; in September, when the office is set up—will be able to have that financial accountability, have that ability to make sure that the government is actually on track with what they’re telling the people about what their spending plans are. That’s going to hold true, not only for the Liberals starting in September, but for every single government going forward.

I think that’s a huge win for the people of Ontario, because it will prevent the kind of scandals we’ve seen from happening again. It will prevent things like the eHealth scandal. It will prevent things like the Ornge air ambulance scandal. It will help us to prevent problems with the dilution of chemotherapy drugs from happening. This office is something that is well deserved by the people of this province, because they told New Democrats during the process of consultation after the budget was tabled that they wanted to see their precious public money being invested in a proper way, in a way that actually made sure that the services they needed were going to be delivered, not that money was going to go to well-connected Liberal insiders, not that money was going to go to those folks who the government wanted it to go to in order to save their own seats—for example, private power companies in Oakville and Mississauga—but that their money is invested in the services they need. That Financial Accountability Office is going to help us to make sure that happens.

We think that’s an important achievement. We think that’s an important piece of the results we were able to get for Ontarians. Obviously the Conservatives have not been interested in getting results for Ontarians. They have not been interested in bringing a Financial Accountability Office to Ontario. They don’t think it’s their job to get results for people. New Democrats disagree. We think we do have to get results for people.

What else were we able to do? We were able to deliver concrete results for families. We heard loudly and clearly that there were a number of things that families were feeling very much that needed to be addressed, and so we took their advice. We recommended to the government a number of things that should be included in the budget, and, lo and behold, they were included in the budget, and we’re very, very proud of that achievement.

So what are New Democrats delivering for Ontarians? We’re delivering a youth jobs plan that’s going to make sure that young people actually have a chance at their first job. Speaker, I’ve talked to so many parents over the last number of years who are very worried that their sons and daughters are still going to be in the basement watching TV when they’re 25 years old, when they’re 30 years old, because they can’t get their foot in the door for a decent job.

It is a failure of us as a Parliament, as a Legislature, if we do not take seriously the future of our youth, and New Democrats take that very seriously. Apparently Conservatives do not, because they were not interested in getting results for young people in this province or for their parents. But New Democrats were, and we now have a youth jobs program that's going to help young people to ensure that they get that first chance in the workplace. We're very, very proud of that.

Speaker, you just heard from the Conservatives, who say that they much prefer to see auto insurance continue to increase, that they much prefer to see people struggle to pay their bills because that auto insurance bill, that premium, goes up year over year over year. They would rather see a system that's broken and that's frankly ripping off drivers in Ontario thrive because it's good for the insurance industry. It is not good for the people of this province, and New Democrats worked hard to get a 15% reduction in auto insurance rates. We delivered that to the people of Ontario, and we're proud of that.

Another thing people told us loudly and clearly is that they're very concerned about the home care system in this province. They have seen too many of their relatives, too many of the relatives of their friends and their neighbours languish in their homes without getting the kind of home care supports they need and deserve.

What New Democrats did is, we delivered on a better home care system for the people of Ontario so that their loved ones are going to get timely, expedient home care services because that's what they deserve. That's what New Democrats have been able to deliver for them in this budget process.

But apparently, Conservatives are not interested in getting real results on home care, just like they're not interested in getting real results in auto insurance, and they're not interested in getting any results when it comes to youth jobs.

The reality is, we were put here by the people of this province for a particular reason, which is to work on their behalf, to get things done for them. New Democrats took that responsibility seriously. We took it seriously last time around in the last budget, and we took it seriously this time around. I think Ontarians can see very clearly who it is that is prepared to take the tougher path, make the tougher decisions, roll up our sleeves, put our noses to the grindstone and get things done for Ontarians, and that's New Democrats because that's what we're here for.

It's interesting, Speaker, because there were some things that New Democrats wanted to see in this budget that we didn't see, and it was quite surprising for us. We told the government, "You don't have to cut hospitals to be able to pay for better home care. You can actually stop letting CEOs in hospitals have their salaries rise and rise and rise. Let's put a cap on those CEO salaries in hospitals and use those dollars to help boost our home care system."

Liberals preferred to cut hospitals, cut beds in hospitals and cut jobs in hospitals in order to pay for home

care. New Democrats think that's the wrong thing to do. They didn't take our advice when it came to putting caps on CEO salaries in hospitals. They didn't take our advice when it came to streamlining the administration of CCACs and LHINs and using those dollars to fund improvements in home care. They didn't take our advice when it came to bulk purchasing within the CCACs and LHINs and using those savings to improve our home care system.

No, Speaker, the Liberals take the easy path and decide that they're just going to start cutting hospitals in order to pay for home care. They call that a transformation in health care. We call it a big mistake that's going to cause real problems for the people of Ontario's access to hospitals, and we're quite concerned about it.

Another thing that the government refused to do is implement our suggestions, our recommendations, around closing of corporate loopholes and also to make sure the new loopholes that they're about to open for corporations don't actually open in the next year or two. Again, Liberals talk the talk, but when it comes to making those hard decisions, the hard decisions that say everybody has to pay their fair share to make sure we have home care for seniors, to make sure that we have jobs for young people—that's what New Democrats believe. Liberals obviously do not because they continue to allow these corporate loopholes to exist and, in fact, are looking forward, I believe, to opening new corporate tax loopholes and beginning to reduce corporate taxes yet again and beginning to take away the fairness taxes that we were able to put in the last budget.

It's a formula that doesn't work, and I think this government needs to recognize that they need to rethink what their perspective is when it comes to who needs to pay the burden of these services that the people in this province deserve and expect. I would say that it needs to be a fairly shared burden, and that's one of the things that New Democrats firmly believe in and we're going to work towards as we go forward.

Look, Speaker, we are going to go forward. We are going to spend the next couple of weeks of this month, then there's going to be about a month of silence and then we're going to spend a couple of weeks in August making sure that the committee that is looking into the gas plant scandal is doing its work. We need to continue to look for answers at that committee.

Liberals decided they weren't going to have a public inquiry. They weren't going to take our advice and put a public inquiry in place. We think that was a big mistake. All it left us with, though, Speaker, in terms of a process to get the answers for Ontario, is the committee. I have to say, I am darned proud of the work that New Democrats have been doing on that committee. In fact, it was Peter Tabuns, the MPP for Toronto—Danforth—we all know this—who asked the Information and Privacy Commissioner to look into the issue of missing documents and missing emails, emails that we discovered later were destroyed by the chiefs of staff of the Minister of Energy and a chief of staff of the Premier, as well as his energy

adviser. If it wasn't for the hard work that was done in committee, people would not know how deep the cover-up goes. I believe there are still answers to be found. We still do not know how deep that rabbit hole goes, and we are going to continue to do our work to get the answers for people.

1600

Unfortunately, Liberals and Conservatives decided that, in the month of July, they'd rather work on their golf games than actually work on a committee to get the answer for Ontarians. Bottom line: New Democrats want to sit every single week of this summer so that we can get to the answers for Ontarians, because that's our job, and that's our responsibility. So it's unfortunate that the more important thing for these folks is their golf handicap, as my colleague from the riding of Essex has said a couple of times in this chamber.

We know what our job is. Our job is not only to deliver results for people like we did in the budget, and our job is not only to make sure that accountability measures are in place going forward so that the kinds of scandals that we've seen are not happening in Ontario in the future; it's also to make sure that the answers that people deserve are actually discovered, that we actually get to the bottom of what happened with those gas plants. That's why we are definitely of the opinion that that committee should be meeting more and not less and that the committee is more important than the greens.

You know what? It is our job to get results for people. It is our job to get results for families in this province, and we've actually respected that job. We've actually done the work that we needed to do to make sure that we got those results. You know what, Speaker? It wasn't always easy. It has not necessarily been an easy path. But as I said, we took our responsibility seriously, we rolled up our sleeves, and we did do the hard work that got those results. We're proud of that.

You know what? We had other results, too, and other victories. Just the other day, the Minister of Health was crowing about a new investment to get more inspectors in long-term care. She was basically re-announcing a commitment that the government made three years ago in terms of making sure long-term-care facilities are properly inspected. Well, it was my critic, the member for Nickel Belt, who actually put the government on the hot seat when it came to the fact that they were breaking their own legislation about inspections in long-term care. That's the kind of results that New Democrats get for Ontarians.

It's the same thing when we put the pressure on the government in terms of their game-playing—no pun—around whether or not they were going to be bonusing a casino in downtown Toronto. It was our pressure, the pressure from members like the member from Trinity-Spadina, the member from Parkdale-High Park and the member for Davenport, who put pressure on this government to come clean when it came to their casino plans. We are proud of what we were able to deliver for the people of the Toronto area who were very concerned

that a downtown casino was going to be something that they were going to have to face down. We made sure that the people had their issue dealt with here in the Legislature.

Another big thing that New Democrats have worked on where we got results for people is in the review of what happened with the watered-down chemotherapy drugs here in Ontario. Let's face it: It was the hard work of New Democrats at that committee as well that peeled through the information and is trying to get to the bottom of why this happened and how we can make sure it doesn't happen again. It's not because it's easy work to do, not because it doesn't take any time—it takes time, and it's hard work—but because we're committed to getting the answers for people and making sure that problems are solved so we don't have these kinds of issues occurring over and over again in this province. That's the kind of work New Democrats do.

The horse racing industry is another one. It's an issue that—this government, once again, made a very bad mistake when it came to the horse racing industry. We pushed and we pushed and we pushed. We've been fighting with those horse people for years now to get the government to reverse their decision. I'm pleased to hear there is some sense now of hope that the government is reversing in its tracks on that bad decision because of the pressure that the member for Essex and that the member for Hamilton East-Stoney Creek have been putting on this government to reverse that wrong-headed decision and save the horse racing industry here in Ontario.

Another big issue that we've been fighting for, on behalf of northern communities—the northeast anyway—is the ONTC. This is another decision that was a mistake that this government made. It's another decision that we are trying to have reversed. It's another decision that they blindly made, with complete disregard for northerners and their access to transportation corridors and transportation opportunities. The member for Timmins-James Bay, the member for Timiskaming-Cochrane and the member for Algoma-Manitoulin have been relentless in the pressure that they've been putting on this government, and I'm hearing now that there's a reversal on the way when it comes to the ONTC, possibly.

Speaker, we are proud of the work that we have been able to do on behalf of Ontarians. Is that work over? Absolutely not. I can tell you, for sure, that we would rather sit here with some bruises and some scars and some frustration because of the kind of rancour that we get from, particularly, the other opposition party—but we are proud, and we'll wear those scars with pride because we got them while we got results for the people of this province. That's what we're here for. That's what it's all about.

I'm going to end by just saying one of the things that's really obvious. When we got here in a minority parliament, we had a choice to make. We could either step to the side, sit on the sidelines, throw arrows, throw insults, hang from the chandeliers, scream until we turned blue in the face, and try to make such political hay that it helped us politically in terms of our partisan interests. We didn't

do that. The Progressive Conservative Party did that. They felt that that was their job. We felt that our job was something quite different. Our choice was the other choice. Our choice was the choice that said, "Our political partisan interests are not the priority. The priority is actually getting some results for the people of Ontario, respecting the decision they made in terms of a minority Parliament, and making sure that we can actually get some things happening to solve some problems and make life better for the people of this province." That's what we decided to do, and we're proud of the choice that we made. We said, "Yes, we can." They said, "No, we won't."

We are proud today to vote on a motion that is going to bring this session to an end, and it's going to bring it to an end with a number of victories—not for us, but victories for the people of this province.

You can sit on the sidelines and watch the parade go by, or you can actually jump in and be part of making this province better. We decided to do that. We decided that we were going to get results. The other party, the Conservatives, have nothing to show for the last session, except maybe hoarse voices and falling-out hair.

Speaker, I want to end by saying thank to you my New Democrat colleagues. And thank you to the people of Ontario for participating so vigorously in our consultation processes, both before the budget and once the budget had been tabled. It's because of your feedback and input that we were able to make some really great things happen for this province, and we appreciate that.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further debate? The Chair recognizes the member Elgin-Middlesex-London.

1610

Interjections.

Mr. Jeff Yurek: —shut me down, but I'll still be able to speak on behalf of our party. It's important that we understand the nature of the budget and bill and why it is not only a practical point, but also a moral imperative to not support this budget.

I want to begin by talking about the relationship between the government's finances and the economy. Ontario's economy is complex and multifaceted. Every Ontarian has an interest in ensuring our economy is strong and thrives. A strong economy employs more people, results in better wages and generates healthy levels of tax revenue to pay for our schools and hospitals.

These past five years have been challenging times in economic terms. While Ontario's economy is diverse and strong, the challenges of the past five years have exposed some significant weaknesses. I'm afraid to say that many of those weaknesses happen to be on the policy side of things.

Let me be clear: The government does not drive the economy. However, the government's success relies on the conditions the government creates. A government can either put in place policies that cultivate a healthy economy, or undermine it. Unfortunately, as the evidence suggests, this government has consistently made decisions that contributed to the latter.

For instance, we need only look at the government's record of fiscal mismanagement. When this government came to power, it had big plans. It promised everything to everybody and was determined to spend money to keep everyone happy. When times were economically good, this government went to the taxpayer to get more money to finance all its spending commitments.

Despite signing a pledge during the 2003 election to not raise taxes, Premier McGuinty went to the taxpayer with new taxes, like the health tax and eco fees. From 2004 to 2005, revenue increased 11%, according to Statistics Canada. Times were good, and this government felt there was an endless pot of money it had access to.

What did they spend the money on? Between 2004 and 2011, the average annual growth in total wages for the public sector was just under 5%. It's important to note that the average annual inflation rate at the same period was 1.94%, so wage growth far outpaced rises in the cost of living.

I understand the government's desire to spend more and more on public sector wages. Let us say it's a sense of political opportunism. They wanted to reward the groups and the organizations that helped them get elected. Unfortunately, this government rewarded them using billions of additional dollars taken from the taxpayer.

The problem with this tax-and-spend approach is that it represents a rise in structural spending, structural spending, of course, being the type of spending that is for the most part fixed, despite fluctuations in the economy. High levels of structural spending exposes a jurisdiction to excessively large deficits and a compromised financial position in the event of an economic downturn. At 55 cents of every dollar being spent on public sector compensation, I think we can all agree this is unsustainable.

Of course, in 2008, the markets crashed, plunging most of the developed world into a recession and exposing the irresponsibility of this government. Now, I don't blame this government for the recession, but I do admonish them for ignoring that recessions do occur and neglecting to prepare our province's finances accordingly.

I have mentioned a few times in the House the fable of the grasshopper and the ant. Everybody knows it. The grasshopper frolics all spring and fall while the ant prepares for the winter. Soon winter comes, and the grasshopper perishes. Just like the grasshopper, this government has failed to acknowledge that winter is coming and that recessions do occur. As a result, Ontario has faced record large deficits that have shaken the confidence of our finances.

When we look at the data from Statistics Canada, we get a more realistic picture of this government's financial management. StatsCan published the actual data at the end of each year. That is after all the cheques have been cashed and all the receipts have been accounted for.

What's interesting to note is that this government, despite claims otherwise, has never taken in more revenue than expenditures. Every year, after all the taxes

were collected and expenses were paid, there was a shortfall. Every time you have more expenses than income, you add to your debt.

Every year, this Liberal government has added to Ontario's debt. Over the entire course of their time in power, they have doubled Ontario's debt. It now stands at \$273 billion, or 37.5% of GDP.

Drummond has warned us that if spending is not significantly curbed, we would hit a total debt of \$411 billion, or 51% of GDP. Ontario's current debt-to-GDP stands at the same level Greece's did in the 1980s.

This government had the opportunity to set Ontario in a different direction, to define itself independent of the McGuinty legacy. However, they failed to do so, and it has now become the McGuinty-Wynne legacy. Spending has increased \$3.6 billion, with no credible plan to achieve balance. In fact, RBC economists have noted that the back end of the Wynne-McGuinty budget was "aspirational" in nature. This was just a fancy way of saying the government hopes it'll magically be able to balance the budget in the last two years of its five-year plan after it continues to increase spending and accumulate more debt.

Premier Wynne failed to differentiate herself from McGuinty. She pushes the hard decisions down the road to balancing this budget. How else did she fail to differentiate herself? I think we can all remember the NDP coming forward with their laundry list of demands, demands that would cost the taxpayers \$1 billion. Did Wynne stand up to the NDP and tell them that the health of Ontario's economy depended on spending restraint? Did she tell the NDP that if Ontario doesn't get its fiscal house in order we'll continue to lose jobs and drive investment out of this province? Did she say that we simply cannot afford \$1 billion in additional spending? The answer is no.

Instead, Wynne did what McGuinty did whenever he faced a tough decision between doing what is right for the province and pandering to a group to keep his government afloat: She caved to every single one of the NDP's demands, and the NDP sold everything they believed in and stood for for \$1 billion. This approach to fiscal management is a proven failure.

In a survey by the CFIB, 68% of respondents indicated the debt and deficit was one of the most important issues affecting their business. The reason is simple: A government with a balanced budget has the capacity to create conditions that help these businesses expand. When they expand, they hire more people, which ultimately drives our economy. This translates into more tax revenue for the government to spend on hospitals and education. This is fundamental and a practical process. Yet this government has blatantly abandoned such an approach in favour of more spending. This budget fails to instill confidence in Ontario's finances. Therefore, it fails to encourage job creation and pushes investors out of this province. It continues to increase the \$20,000 of debt my daughter is now responsible for and every single child in this province.

For these reasons, I cannot and will not support this budget. The other reason I will not be supporting this budget is a little more straightforward. In fact, I feel there's a very basic moral obligation to oppose this bill. The fact of the matter is this Wynne-McGuinty government has broken the law. It's plain and simple and written in black and white by this province's well-respected independent privacy commissioner.

I, in good conscience, cannot support the agenda of a corrupt government. The actions of this Liberal government have wasted \$585 billion in taxpayer money all to save a couple of seats in Toronto—excuse me, \$585 million; it will be "billion" if we keep these guys in power. The Liberals then went on to great efforts to cover it up, and now we have a scandal that people are paralleling to the Watergate scandal. The Ontario people don't deserve this from the government.

Unfortunately, it would appear the NDP don't feel the same way. For all their talk about accountability, they refuse to hold the government accountable to the people they ultimately work for, the people of Ontario. I understand that the NDP do not agree with my assessment of spending or how a balanced budget strengthens our economy, and that's fine. But I think we have the same perspective when it comes to the law. They know the Liberals have broken the law and they should do the right thing and vote against this budget. If they support this budget, they are validating the illegal actions of the Liberals and, as far as I'm concerned, they are complicit.

I'll finish by making a plea to the NDP: Do the right thing. Hold this government to account and vote against the budget.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further debate?

Mr. Steve Clark: I'm pleased to provide a few minutes of comments in addition to those already put on the record by my colleagues from Thornhill and from Elgin-Middlesex-London. I'm going to take a little bit of a different approach because I think I've put my comments on the record about this government's budgetary policy—I think during today's question period, my leader, the leader of Her Majesty's loyal opposition, the member for Niagara West-Glanbrook, Tim Hudak, brought forward some excellent questions to the Premier and also some comments to the leader of the third party about how this session has really opened many Ontarians' eyes.

Quite frankly, we've got two OPP investigations. To me, it's unprecedented. For us not to be in a position to be able to continue the work in this Legislature, past a vote today, I think is criminal.

1620

However, I'm going to use my time to talk about the member for Simcoe—Grey, Mr. Wilson, our House leader in the official opposition.

There's been lots of talk about House leaders. When we discuss the business of the Legislature, the 105 members who are still here—we've got a couple of seats vacant—many people talk about how this has been referred to House leaders. This has been a decision that

rests in front of House leaders. I want to compliment my House leader. I think we were pretty clear in the meetings that Mr. Hudak and the Premier had—that we were miles apart in terms of budget policy for the province should come as no surprise. We took the four months that the House prorogued to deal with some policy. We put some very, very innovative policies forward, and the government just totally ignored those good ideas.

Again, I want to mention the member for Simcoe-Grey, Mr. Wilson, our House leader. Regardless of how we vote on this motion, he's tried and done an exceptional job of trying to move forward; as an experienced legislator—someone who's been here for a number of years—he's tried, with what little consensus we have, to make things work. He has brought forward to his counterparts—Mr. Milloy, the government House leader, and Mr. Bisson, the House leader of the New Democratic Party—a number of positions we would have supported, had we been able to have the NDP and Liberals support us. He made it very clear in some of his negotiations on Bill 14, the co-op housing act, that we were prepared to have that bill go through second reading and bring it back for third reading after it went to committee briefly.

As well, the Local Food Act: I think a number of our caucus members have expressed our desire to see that act move forward. Granted, the member for Oxford had some suggestions on what needed to be passed; the member for Nepean-Carleton as well on food literacy; the member for Sarnia-Lambton had some suggestions in terms of food banks and farmers—all very good ideas that needed co-operation from the other two parties to move forward and go to committee.

In terms of private members' bills, after the 2011 election, we actually had some co-operation—very quickly after the election, Mr. Colle's bill for Jewish Heritage Month and my bill for Major General Isaac Brock were passed lickety-split. All three parties agreed and they were passed. Then later on in that session, we had a programming motion that we never did get to pass, where the NDP had a private member's bill; Mr. Bailey, the member for Sarnia-Lambton, had his One Call bill passed, and then the House prorogued.

We showed that, regardless of how the budgetary policy of this government differs from ours, our House leader, Mr. Wilson, was able to make inroads with the government House leader and the House leader of the NDP—that didn't happen this time.

Mr. Hardeman has tabled his carbon monoxide bill five times—five times it's been in front of the government. The government has made changes. We've agreed with those changes. My bill, Bill 70, on spousal exemption has been put forward, passed by all parties at second reading. I've sat down with the government. We've made some changes that we both can agree with. Those bills will sit idle all summer, and it's a crime that we couldn't have moved those forward.

The government even finally told us some of the bills that they were interested in, and we were quite willing to let some of those go and move forward as part of all-party agreement. Ms. Albanese, the member for York

South-Weston; Mr. Craitor, the member for Niagara Falls—he's tabled his bill six times. I think there was some agreement by Mr. Wilson that we should move some of those forward. As well, Mr. Dhillon, Ms. Elliott and Mr. Prue—the members for Brampton West, Whitby-Oshawa and Beaches-East York—there was a human resource professional bill that I think we had some general consensus that we wanted to move that forward. Even though the government picked up the member for Nickel Belt's tanning bed bill and had made some announcements about the member for Hamilton East-Stoney Creek's sprinklers-in-nursing-homes bill—even though they had said they would take those on themselves, there was also some discussion regarding the member for Beaches-East York's tip-out bill and the member for Hamilton East-Stoney Creek's child entertainers bills. Again, those bills are not moving forward. They're not going to committee. I think that's a shame. Certainly Mr. Wilson, our House leader, was quite willing to move those forward, with some consensus.

Proclamation bills: I've sat in the Legislative Assembly committee. There's my binder for Legislative Assembly, talking about changes to the standing orders. It's a joke. Proclamation bills, as far as I'm concerned—and this is just my own opinion. I think all proclamations should go to the table. We should pick a percentage, either 50% or a supermajority of 66%. We should sign on; when we get that number, they should come up. We should have a 15-minute debate, vote on second and third reading, and be done with those proclamations. They shouldn't be sitting on the order paper habitually.

We were quite free and quite interested in talking about passing Ms. Damerla's Pope John Paul II Day—the member for Mississauga East-Cooksville. First Responders' Day, the member for Newmarket-Aurora, Mr. Klees: That's a bill that should have been passed. Sikh Heritage Month, Mr. Singh, the member for Bramalea-Gore-Malton: That should have been passed. There are other bills. I've got a flag bill. Mr. Singh has got a meningitis awareness bill. The member for Scarborough-Agincourt, Ms. Wong, has a children and youth day. There should be no reason, in a minority Parliament, that we shouldn't be able to have those three House leaders sit down and decide on some very simple proclamations. We make ourselves look foolish because we can't seem to settle down on something as bloody easy as a proclamation.

Finally, Speaker, in a couple of minutes, I just want to again talk about the member for Simcoe-Grey, our House leader. He was quite prepared to have committees work. In the last session, we were able to have some consensus on committees meeting. We've got general government, where we're dealing with gridlock, where we're dealing with the ARA, and again there's no consensus to move those committees forward. Estimates: We had brought forward some ideas about sitting four or five days. SCOFEA: There was a Bill 74 that was passed; I think some members in the government had said that maybe we could have finance meeting. Again, social policy: While the LHIN review and the chemotherapy

bill are in front of that right now, I think we could have had consensus to move local food out of social policy and get it into a committee that could actually have hearings and go across the province.

I think it's sad that we can't have consensus on bills that we agree with in general terms—granted, there will be amendments—simple proclamations. I think it's absolutely ridiculous, and we look foolish as legislators that we can't agree in the last bit of the session.

Finally, the select committee on developmental services: I think it's criminal that we have to deal a select committee when all parties sat here on private members' day and agreed to it. Surely to goodness the three House leaders, especially the government House leader and the NDP—

Mr. Jim Wilson: I agreed to all of it.

Mr. Steve Clark: He agreed to every single thing, John; he did. He agreed. The budget decision was made. They decided nothing else was going to get passed. They decided no government bills were going to get passed, no private members' bills were going to be passed, no proclamations were going to be passed. You know what? Quite frankly, people in this province have—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Order.

Mr. Steve Clark: Mr. Wilson can look all Ontarians in the eye and tell them exactly what he proposed. Mr. Milloy will have to speak for himself and Mr. Bisson will have to speak for himself.

But I tell you, I think that we could have done Ontarians a service to rise above some of the rhetoric that's taking place at the municipal and federal levels. I think we could have done the right thing, co-operated and gotten some of these bills passed. I think it's disgraceful.

Interjections.

Mr. Steve Clark: Listen, this government is under two OPP investigations. You guys have got nothing to yap to me about.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further debate?

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Order. Minister, come to order.

Pursuant to the order of the House dated Wednesday, June 5, 2013, I am now required to put the question.

Mr. Sousa has moved third reading of Bill 65, An Act to implement Budget measures and to enact and amend various Acts. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour of the motion will please say "aye."

All those opposed will say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

Call in the members. This will be a five-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1630 to 1635.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): All those in favour of the motion will rise one at a time, please, and be recorded by the Clerk.

Ayes
Albanese, Laura
Armstrong, Teresa J.
Balkissoon, Bas
Bartolucci, Rick
Berardinetti, Lorenzo
Bisson, Gilles
Bradley, James J.
Broten, Laurel C.
Campbell, Sarah
Cansfield, Donna H.
Chan, Michael
Chiarelli, Bob
Colle, Mike
Coteau, Michael
Crack, Grant
Craitor, Kim
Damerla, Dipika
Del Duca, Steven
Delaney, Bob
Dhillon, Vic
Dickson, Joe
DiNovo, Cheri
Duguid, Brad
Fife, Catherine
Flynn, Kevin Daniel
Foster, Cindy
Gerretsen, John
Gélinas, France
Horwath, Andrea
Hoskins, Eric
Jaczek, Helena
Jeffrey, Linda
Kwinter, Monte
Leal, Jeff
MacCharles, Tracy
Mangat, Amit
Mantha, Michael
Marchese, Rosario
Matthews, Deborah
Mauro, Bill
McMeekin, Ted
McNeely, Phil
Meilleur, Madeleine
Miller, Paul
Milloy, John
Mordi, Reza
Murray, Glen R.
Naqvi, Yasir
Natyshak, Taras
Oraziotti, David
Piruzza, Teresa
Prue, Michael
Qaadri, Shafiq
Sandals, Liz
Schein, Jonah
Sergio, Mario
Singh, Jagmeet
Sousa, Charles
Tabuns, Peter
Taylor, Monique
Vanthof, John
Wong, Soo
Wynne, Kathleen O.
Zimmer, David

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): All those opposed to the motion will please rise one at a time and be recorded by the Clerk.

Nays
Arnett, Ted
Bailey, Robert
Barrett, Toby
Chudleigh, Ted
Clark, Steve
Dunlop, Garfield
Elliott, Christine
Fedeli, Victor
Hardeman, Ernie
Harris, Michael
Hillier, Randy
Hudak, Tim
Jackson, Rod
Jones, Sylvia
Klees, Frank
Leone, Rob
MacLaren, Jack
MacLeod, Lisa
McDonell, Jim
McKenna, Jane
McNaughton, Monte
Miller, Norm
Milligan, Rob E.
Munro, Julia
Nicholls, Rick
O'Toole, John
Ouellette, Jerry J.
Pettapiece, Randy
Scott, Laurie
Shurman, Peter
Smith, Todd
Thompson, Lisa M.
Walker, Bill
Wilson, Jim
Yakabuski, John
Yurek, Jeff

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 64; the nays are 36.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I declare the motion carried.

Third reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be it resolved that the bill do now pass and be entitled as in the motion.

VISITOR

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Nepean–Carleton on a point of order.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity.

In the members' gallery west today, we have a friend from Nova Scotia here, Jamie Baillie, who is the leader of the Progressive Conservative Party of Nova Scotia, an old friend of mine. I appreciate him being here today.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): We always welcome our guests.

I would like to offer to the members and to their families a safe and healthy summer.

This House stands adjourned until Monday, September 9, 2013, at 10:30 a.m.

The House adjourned at 1640.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO
ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Lieutenant Governor / Lieutenant-gouverneur: Hon. / L'hon. David C. Onley, O.Ont.

Speaker / Président: Hon. / L'hon. Dave Levac

Clerk / Greffière: Deborah Deller

Clerks-at-the-Table / Greffiers parlementaires: Todd Decker, Tonia Grannum, Trevor Day, Anne Stokes
 Sergeant-at-Arms / Sergent d'armes: Dennis Clark

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Albanese, Laura (LIB)	York South–Weston / York-Sud-Weston	
Armstrong, Teresa J. (NDP)	London–Fanshawe	
Arnott, Ted (PC)	Wellington–Halton Hills	First Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Premier vice-président du comité plénier de l'Assemblée
Bailey, Robert (PC)	Sarnia–Lambton	
Balkissoon, Bas (LIB)	Scarborough–Rouge River	Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Président du comité plénier de l'Assemblée Deputy Speaker / Vice-président
Barrett, Toby (PC)	Haldimand–Norfolk	
Bartolucci, Rick (LIB)	Sudbury	
Berardinetti, Lorenzo (LIB)	Scarborough Southwest / Scarborough–Sud-Ouest	
Best, Margaret R. (LIB)	Scarborough–Guildwood	
Bisson, Gilles (NDP)	Timmins–James Bay / Timmins–Baie James	House Leader, Recognized Party / Leader parlementaire de parti reconnu
Bradley, Hon. / L'hon. James J. (LIB)	St. Catharines	Minister of the Environment / Ministre de l'Environnement Deputy Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint du gouvernement
Brotin, Hon. / L'hon. Laurel C. (LIB)	Etobicoke–Lakeshore	Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs / Ministre des Affaires intergouvernementales Minister Responsible for Women's Issues / Ministre déléguée à la Condition féminine
Campbell, Sarah (NDP)	Kenora–Rainy River	
Cansfield, Donna H. (LIB)	Etobicoke Centre / Etobicoke-Centre	
Chan, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (LIB)	Markham–Unionville	Minister of Tourism, Culture and Sport / Ministre du Tourisme, de la Culture et du Sport Minister Responsible for the 2015 Pan and Parapan American Games / Ministre responsable des Jeux panaméricains et parapanaméricains de 2015
Chiarelli, Hon. / L'hon. Bob (LIB)	Ottawa West–Nepean / Ottawa-Ouest–Nepean	Minister of Energy / Ministre de l'Énergie
Chudleigh, Ted (PC)	Halton	
Clark, Steve (PC)	Leeds–Grenville	Deputy Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint de l'opposition officielle
Colle, Mike (LIB)	Eglinton–Lawrence	
Coteau, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (LIB)	Don Valley East / Don Valley-Est	Minister of Citizenship and Immigration / Ministre des Affaires civiques et de l'Immigration
Crack, Grant (LIB)	Glengarry–Prescott–Russell	
Craitor, Kim (LIB)	Niagara Falls	
Damerla, Dipika (LIB)	Mississauga East–Cooksville / Mississauga-Est–Cooksville	
Del Duca, Steven (LIB)	Vaughan	
Delaney, Bob (LIB)	Mississauga–Streetsville	
Dhillon, Vic (LIB)	Brampton West / Brampton-Ouest	
Dickson, Joe (LIB)	Ajax–Pickering	
DiNovo, Cheri (NDP)	Parkdale–High Park	
Duguid, Hon. / L'hon. Brad (LIB)	Scarborough Centre / Scarborough-Centre	Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities / Ministre de la Formation et des Collèges et Universités
Dunlop, Garfield (PC)	Simcoe North / Simcoe-Nord	
Elliott, Christine (PC)	Whitby–Oshawa	Deputy Leader, Official Opposition / Chef adjointe de l'opposition officielle
Fedeli, Victor (PC)	Nipissing	
Fife, Catherine (NDP)	Kitchener–Waterloo	

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Flynn, Kevin Daniel (LIB)	Oakville	
Forster, Cindy (NDP)	Welland	Deputy House Leader, Recognized Party / Leader parlementaire adjointe de parti reconnu
Gélinas, France (NDP)	Nickel Belt	
Gerretsen, Hon. / L'hon. John (LIB)	Kingston and the Islands / Kingston et les îles	Attorney General / Procureur général
Gravelle, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (LIB)	Thunder Bay–Superior North / Thunder Bay–Superior-Nord	Minister of Northern Development and Mines / Ministre du Développement du Nord et des Mines
Hardeman, Ernie (PC)	Oxford	
Harris, Michael (PC)	Kitchener–Conestoga	
Hillier, Randy (PC)	Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington	
Horwath, Andrea (NDP)	Hamilton Centre / Hamilton-Centre	Leader, Recognized Party / Chef de parti reconnu Leader, New Democratic Party of Ontario / Chef du Nouveau parti démocratique de l'Ontario
Hoskins, Hon. / L'hon. Eric (LIB)	St. Paul's	Minister of Economic Development, Trade and Employment / Ministre du Développement économique, du Commerce et de l'Emploi
Hudak, Tim (PC)	Niagara West–Glanbrook / Niagara-Ouest–Glanbrook	Leader, Official Opposition / Chef de l'opposition officielle Leader, Progressive Conservative Party of Ontario / Chef du Parti progressiste-conservateur de l'Ontario
Jackson, Rod (PC)	Barrie	
Jaczek, Helina (LIB)	Oak Ridges–Markham	
Jeffrey, Hon. / L'hon. Linda (LIB)	Brampton–Springdale	Chair of Cabinet / Présidente du Conseil des ministres Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing / Ministre des Affaires municipales et du Logement
Jones, Sylvia (PC)	Dufferin–Caledon	
Klees, Frank (PC)	Newmarket–Aurora	
Kwinter, Monte (LIB)	York Centre / York-Centre	
Leal, Hon. / L'hon. Jeff (LIB)	Peterborough	Minister of Rural Affairs / Ministre des Affaires rurales
Leone, Rob (PC)	Cambridge	
Levac, Hon. / L'hon. Dave (LIB)	Brant	Speaker / Président de l'Assemblée législative
MacCharles, Hon. / L'hon. Tracy (LIB)	Pickering–Scarborough East / Pickering–Scarborough-Est	Minister of Consumer Services / Ministre des Services aux consommateurs
MacLaren, Jack (PC)	Carleton–Mississippi Mills	
MacLeod, Lisa (PC)	Nepean–Carleton	
Mangat, Amrit (LIB)	Mississauga–Brampton South / Mississauga–Brampton-Sud	
Mantha, Michael (NDP)	Algoma–Manitoulin	
Marchese, Rosario (NDP)	Trinity–Spadina	
Matthews, Hon. / L'hon. Deborah (LIB)	London North Centre / London-Centre-Nord	Deputy Premier / Vice-première ministre Minister of Health and Long-Term Care / Ministre de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée
Mauro, Bill (LIB)	Thunder Bay–Atikokan	
McDonell, Jim (PC)	Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry	
McGuinty, Dalton (LIB)	Ottawa South / Ottawa-Sud	
McKenna, Jane (PC)	Burlington	
McMeekin, Hon. / L'hon. Ted (LIB)	Ancaster–Dundas–Flamborough–Westdale	Minister of Community and Social Services / Ministre des Services sociaux et communautaires
McNaughton, Monte (PC)	Lambton–Kent–Middlesex	
McNeely, Phil (LIB)	Ottawa–Orléans	
Meilleur, Hon. / L'hon. Madeleine (LIB)	Ottawa–Vanier	Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services / Ministre de la Sécurité communautaire et des Services correctionnels Minister Responsible for Francophone Affairs / Ministre déléguée aux Affaires francophones
Miller, Norm (PC)	Parry Sound–Muskoka	
Miller, Paul (NDP)	Hamilton East–Stoney Creek / Hamilton-Est–Stoney Creek	Third Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Troisième vice-président du comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Milligan, Rob E. (PC)	Northumberland–Quinte West	
Milloy, Hon. / L'hon. John (LIB)	Kitchener Centre / Kitchener-Centre	Minister of Government Services / Ministre des Services gouvernementaux Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire du gouvernement

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Moridi, Hon. / L'hon. Reza (LIB)	Richmond Hill	Minister of Research and Innovation / Ministre de la Recherche et de l'Innovation
Munro, Julia (PC)	York-Simcoe	Second Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Deuxième vice-présidente du comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Murray, Hon. / L'hon. Glen R. (LIB)	Toronto Centre / Toronto-Centre	Minister of Infrastructure / Ministre de l'Infrastructure
Naqvi, Hon. / L'hon. Yasir (LIB)	Ottawa Centre / Ottawa-Centre	Minister of Transportation / Ministre des Transports
Natshak, Taras (NDP)	Essex	Minister of Labour / Ministre du Travail
Nicholls, Rick (PC)	Chatham-Kent-Essex	
O'Toole, John (PC)	Durham	
Orazietti, Hon. / L'hon. David (LIB)	Sault Ste. Marie	Minister of Natural Resources / Ministre des Richesses naturelles
Ouellette, Jerry J. (PC)	Oshawa	
Pettapiece, Randy (PC)	Perth–Wellington	
Piruzza, Hon. / L'hon. Teresa (LIB)	Windsor West / Windsor-Ouest	Minister of Children and Youth Services / Ministre des Services à l'enfance et à la jeunesse
Prue, Michael (NDP)	Beaches–East York	
Qaadir, Shafiq (LIB)	Etobicoke North / Etobicoke-Nord	
Sandals, Hon. / L'hon. Liz (LIB)	Guelph	Minister of Education / Ministre de l'Éducation
Schein, Jonah (NDP)	Davenport	
Scott, Laurie (PC)	Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock	
Sergio, Hon. / L'hon. Mario (LIB)	York West / York-Ouest	Minister Responsible for Seniors / Ministre délégué aux Affaires des personnes âgées
Shurman, Peter (PC)	Thornhill	Minister Without Portfolio / Ministre sans portefeuille
Singh, Jagmeet (NDP)	Bramalea–Gore–Malton	
Smith, Todd (PC)	Prince Edward–Hastings	
Sousa, Hon. / L'hon. Charles (LIB)	Mississauga South / Mississauga-Sud	Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet / Président du Conseil de gestion du gouvernement Minister of Finance / Ministre des Finances
Tabuns, Peter (NDP)	Toronto–Danforth	
Takhar, Harinder S. (LIB)	Mississauga–Erindale	
Taylor, Monique (NDP)	Hamilton Mountain	
Thompson, Lisa M. (PC)	Huron–Bruce	
Vanthof, John (NDP)	Timiskaming–Cochrane	
Walker, Bill (PC)	Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound	
Wilson, Jim (PC)	Simcoe–Grey	
Wong, Soo (LIB)	Scarborough–Agincourt	Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire de l'opposition officielle
Wynne, Hon. / L'hon. Kathleen O. (LIB)	Don Valley West / Don Valley-Ouest	Minister of Agriculture and Food / Ministre de l'Agriculture et de l'Alimentation Premier / Première ministre Leader, Government / Chef du gouvernement Leader, Liberal Party of Ontario / Chef du Parti libéral de l'Ontario
Yakabuski, John (PC)	Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke	
Yurek, Jeff (PC)	Elgin–Middlesex–London	
Zimmer, Hon. / L'hon. David (LIB)	Willowdale	Minister of Aboriginal Affairs / Ministre des Affaires autochtones
Vacant	London West / London-Ouest	
Vacant	Windsor–Tecumseh	

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Grant Crack, Kim Craitor
Vic Dhillon, Michael Harris
Rob Leone, Bill Mauro
Taras Natyshak, Taras Natyshak
Rick Nicholls, Michael Prue
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Katch Koch

Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs / Comité permanent des finances et des affaires économiques

Chair / Président: Kevin Daniel Flynn
Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: Soo Wong
Dipika Damerla, Steven Del Duca
Victor Fedeli, Catherine Fife
Kevin Daniel Flynn, Monte McNaughton
Michael Prue, Peter Shurman
Soo Wong
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Katch Koch

Standing Committee on General Government / Comité permanent des affaires gouvernementales

Chair / Président: Bas Balkissoon
Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: Donna H. Cansfield
Bas Balkissoon, Rick Bartolucci
Sarah Campbell, Donna H. Cansfield
Mike Colle, Rosario Marchese
Laurie Scott, Todd Smith
Jeff Yurek
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Sylwia Przedzicki

Standing Committee on Government Agencies / Comité permanent des organismes gouvernementaux

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Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Joe Dickson
Laura Albanese, Lorenzo Berardinetti
Joe Dickson, Jim McDonell
Phil McNeely, Paul Miller
Randy Pettapiece, Monique Taylor
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Committee Clerk / Greffière: Anne Stokes

Standing Committee on Justice Policy / Comité permanent de la justice

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Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: Laura Albanese
Laura Albanese, Teresa J. Armstrong
Steven Del Duca, Bob Delaney
Frank Klees, Jack McLaren
Rob E. Milligan, Shafiq Qaadri
Jonah Schein
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Tamara Pomanski

Standing Committee on the Legislative Assembly / Comité permanent de l'Assemblée législative

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Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: Lisa MacLeod
Bas Balkissoon, Gilles Bisson
Steve Clark, Mike Colle
Garfield Dunlop, Kevin Daniel Flynn
Cindy Forster, Lisa MacLeod
Bill Mauro
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Trevor Day

Standing Committee on Public Accounts / Comité permanent des comptes publics

Chair / Président: Norm Miller
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Toby Barrett
Toby Barrett, Dipika Damerla
France Gélinas, Helena Jaczek
Phil McNeely, Norm Miller
Jerry J. Ouellette, Shafiq Qaadri
Jagmeet Singh
Committee Clerk / Greffier: William Short

Standing Committee on Regulations and Private Bills / Comité permanent des règlements et des projets de loi d'intérêt privé

Chair / Président: Peter Tabuns
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: John Vanthof
Margarett R. Best, Vic Dhillon
Joe Dickson, Randy Hillier
Rod Jackson, Monte Kwinter
Peter Tabuns, John Vanthof
Bill Walker
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Tamara Pomanski

Standing Committee on Social Policy / Comité permanent de la politique sociale

Chair / Président: Ernie Hardeman
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Ted Chudleigh
Lorenzo Berardinetti, Margarett R. Best
Ted Chudleigh, Cheri DiNovo
Ernie Hardeman, Helena Jaczek
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Jane McKenna
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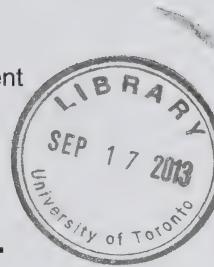
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Second Session, 40th Parliament

Assemblée législative de l'Ontario

Deuxième session, 40^e législature



Official Report of Debates (Hansard)

Journal des débats (Hansard)

Monday 9 September 2013

Lundi 9 septembre 2013

Speaker
Honourable Dave Levac

Président
L'honorabile Dave Levac

Clerk
Deborah Deller

Greffière
Deborah Deller

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Monday 9 September 2013

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Lundi 9 septembre 2013

The House met at 1030.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Good morning, everyone. Welcome back.

Please join me in prayer.

Prayers.

RESIGNATION OF MEMBERS

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I beg to inform the House that, during the adjournment, vacancies have occurred in the membership of the House for the reason of the resignation of Dalton McGuinty as the member for the electoral district of Ottawa South, effective June 12, 2013; by reason of the resignation of Laurel Broten as the member from the electoral district of Etobicoke—Lakeshore, effective June 28, 2013; and by reason of the resignation of Margaret Best as the member from the electoral district of Scarborough—Guildwood, effective June 28, 2013. Accordingly, I have issued my warrants to the Chief Electoral Officer for the issue of the writs for by-elections.

INTRODUCTION OF MEMBERS

FOR OTTAWA SOUTH,
SCARBOROUGH—GUILDWOOD,
ETOBIKOKE—LAKESHORE, WINDSOR—
TECUMSEH AND LONDON WEST

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I beg to inform the House that the Clerk has received from the Chief Electoral Officer and laid upon the table certificates of the by-elections in the electoral districts of Ottawa South, Windsor—Tecumseh, Etobicoke—Lakeshore, Scarborough—Guildwood and London West.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): Certificates of by-elections were received as follows:

“Mrs. Deborah Deller
“Clerk of the Legislative Assembly
“Room 104
“Legislative Building
“Queen’s Park
“Toronto, Ontario
“Dear Mrs. Deller:

“A writ of election dated the 3rd day of July, 2013, was issued by the Honourable Lieutenant Governor of the province of Ontario, and was addressed to Lynne Peterman, returning officer for the electoral district of Ottawa South, for the election of a member to represent the said electoral district of Ottawa South in the Legislative Assembly of this province in the room of Dalton

McGuinty who, since his election as representative of the said electoral district of Ottawa South, has resigned his seat. This is to certify that, a poll having been granted and held in Ottawa South on the 1st day of August, 2013, John Fraser has been returned as duly elected as appears by the return of the said writ of election, dated the 9th day of August, 2013, which is now lodged of record in my office.

“Greg Essensa

“Chief Electoral Officer

“Toronto, August 19, 2013.”

The second certificate:

“Dear Mrs. Deller:

“A writ of election dated the 3rd day of July, 2013, was issued by the Honourable Lieutenant Governor of the province of Ontario, and was addressed to Darryl D’Sousa, returning officer for the electoral district of Scarborough—Guildwood, for the election of a member to represent the said electoral district of Scarborough—Guildwood in the Legislative Assembly of this province in the room of Margaret Best who, since her election as representative of the said electoral district of Scarborough—Guildwood, has resigned her seat. This is to certify that, a poll having been granted and held in Scarborough—Guildwood on the 1st day of August, 2013, Mitzie Hunter has been returned as duly elected as appears by the return of the said writ of election, dated the 9th day of August, 2013, which is now lodged of record in my office.

“Greg Essensa

“Chief Electoral Officer

“Toronto, August 19, 2013.”

Third certificate:

“Dear Mrs. Deller:

“A writ of election dated the 3rd day of July, 2013, was issued by the Honourable Lieutenant Governor of the province of Ontario, and was addressed to Wendy Gibbs, returning officer for the electoral district of Etobicoke—Lakeshore, for the election of a member to represent the said electoral district of Etobicoke—Lakeshore in the Legislative Assembly of this province in the room of Laurel Broten who, since her election as representative of the said electoral district of Etobicoke—Lakeshore, has resigned her seat. This is to certify that, a poll having been granted and held in Etobicoke—Lakeshore on the 1st day of August, 2013, Doug Holyday has been returned as duly elected as appears by the return of the said writ of election, dated the 9th day of August, 2013, which is now lodged of record in my office.

“Greg Essensa
“Chief Electoral Officer
“Toronto, August 19, 2013.”

Fourth certificate:
“Dear Mrs. Deller:

“A writ of election dated the 3rd day of July, 2013, was issued by the Honourable Lieutenant Governor of the province of Ontario, and was addressed to James C. Evans, returning officer for the electoral district of Windsor–Tecumseh, for the election of a member to represent the said electoral district of Windsor–Tecumseh in the Legislative Assembly of this province in the room of Dwight Duncan who, since his election as representative of the said electoral district of Windsor–Tecumseh, has resigned his seat. This is to certify that, a poll having been granted and held in Windsor–Tecumseh on the 1st day of August, 2013, Percy Hatfield has been returned as duly elected as appears by the return of the said writ of election, dated the 9th day of August, 2013, which is now lodged of record in my office.

“Greg Essensa
“Chief Electoral Officer
“Toronto, August 19, 2013.”

Fifth certificate:
“Dear Mrs. Deller:

“A writ of election dated the 3rd day of July, 2013, was issued by the Honourable Lieutenant Governor of the province of Ontario, and was addressed to Karen Mazereeuw, returning officer for the electoral district of London West, for the election of a member to represent the said electoral district of London West in the Legislative Assembly of this province in the room of Chris Bentley who, since his election as representative of the said electoral district of London West, has resigned his seat. This is to certify that, a poll having been granted and held in London West on the 1st day of August, 2013, Peggy Sattler has been returned as duly elected as appears by the return of the said writ of election, dated the 9th day of August, 2013, which is now lodged of record in my office.

“Greg Essensa
“Chief Electoral Officer
“Toronto, August 19, 2013.”

1040

Mr. Fraser was escorted into the House by Ms. Wynne and Mr. Milloy.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Speaker, I have the honour to present to you and to the House John Fraser, member-elect for the electoral district of Ottawa South, who has taken the oath and signed the roll and now claims the right to take his seat.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Let the honourable member take his seat.

Applause.

Ms. Hunter was escorted into the House by Ms. Wynne and Mr. Milloy.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Speaker, I have the honour to present to you and to the House Mitzie Hunter, member-elect for the electoral district of Scarborough—

Guildwood, who has taken the oath and signed the roll and now claims the right to take her seat.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Let the honourable member take her seat.

Applause.

Mr. Holyday was escorted into the House by Mr. Hudak and Mr. Wilson.

Mr. Tim Hudak: Speaker, I have the honour to present to you and to the House Doug Holyday, member-elect for the electoral district of Etobicoke—Lakeshore, who has taken the oath and signed the roll and now claims the right to take his seat.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Let the honourable member take his seat.

Applause.

Mr. Hatfield was escorted into the House by Ms. Horwath and Mr. Bisson.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, I have the honour to present to you and to the House Percy Hatfield, member-elect for the electoral district of Windsor–Tecumseh, who has taken the oath and signed the roll and now claims his right to take his seat.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Let the honourable member take his seat.

Applause.

Ms. Sattler was escorted into the House by Ms. Horwath and Mr. Bisson.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, I have the honour to present to you and to the House Peggy Sattler, member-elect for the electoral district of London West. She has taken the oath and signed the roll and now claims her right to take her seat.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Let the honourable member take her seat.

Applause.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I thank all members for their warm welcome.

1050

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Tim Hudak: I’m pleased to introduce to the assembly—no stranger to the assembly—the former leader of our great party, the Ontario Progressive Conservative Party, and member for Dufferin—Caledon, John Tory, joining us here.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Because I can’t see him, I’m going to assume that he’s smiling and that he’s in good nature because he’s got the pen from the media. I won’t say anything else.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I’d like to introduce some residents of Don Valley West to the Legislature: Barbara Adams, Anne Marie Branch, Linda Dean, Dave Dean, Leanna Foster, Dmitri Logounov, Vanessa Rose, Joan Tadman and Janet MacDougall. They’re all here to witness the day back to question period.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: It is a pleasure to welcome some friends to the chamber here today from the United Steelworkers. They are: Terri Nugent from Parry Sound;

Lisa Cook and Joe Holman from Windsor. I welcome them to the session today.

Mr. Peter Shurman: I'd like to introduce, in the west members' gallery, the best constituency assistant you could possibly have: Mitchell Blash.

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: At the risk of pre-empting you, Speaker, I see that the former Speaker, Dr. Alvin Curling, is here, my constituent. Welcome.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The Minister of Government Services is correct, and I will talk to her.

The member for Scarborough—Guildwood.

Ms. Mitzie Jacquelín Hunter: I would like to welcome my family to Queen's Park. Welcome.

I'd also like to welcome the former Speaker of the 38th Parliament, my dear friend, Mr. Alvin Curling.

I would also like to welcome my constituency staff who are here, as well as our volunteers from Scarborough—Guildwood.

Finally, I would like to welcome the chair of CivicAction, John Tory—another former member of this assembly, as well as the chairman of CivicAction. Welcome.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Somebody else stepping on my toes, here.

The member from Ottawa South.

Mr. John Fraser: I'd like to recognize my wife, Linda Fraser; Fadi El Masry, from my constituency office; and my friends Phil Parsons and Tracey Sobers, who's known to many.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from—

Mr. Todd Smith: It's been a long time: Prince Edward—Hastings.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Prince Edward—Hastings.

Mr. Todd Smith: It hasn't been that long a summer, has it, Mr. Speaker?

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): How could I forget?

Mr. Todd Smith: I'd like to welcome my good friend Simon Chapelle, who's here. His son, Ian, is one of the new pages for the next five weeks here at Queen's Park.

Ms. Dipika Damerla: I'd like to take this opportunity to welcome my father, who's here in the visitors' gallery. Welcome, Dad.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Third time's the charm. In the Speaker's gallery, former member and Speaker of the assembly, for Scarborough North, 33rd, 34th, 35th, 36th; for Scarborough—Rouge River, 37th and 38th; and the Speaker from 2003 to 2005, and joined by members of his staff: Dr. Alvin Curling.

ORAL QUESTIONS

MEMBERS' PRIVILEGES

Mr. Tim Hudak: Again, congratulations to the five new members who joined the assembly today, and their

families that have joined with us as well. I was just talking to Christine and Lisa; I know Norm and Steve went through it. It's very exciting to actually walk in here to the assembly and take your place. Congratulations to all those members and their families here today.

Speaker, a quick question to the Premier: Premier, almost a million people today are jobless. Instead of using the summer to bring forward any agenda around jobs, we saw the Liberals continue with the attempt to bury information around the gas plant scandal, including allegations of intimidation of the Speaker to keep documents outside of public view.

I've come to a conclusion, Premier—I hope you have as well—that the only way to get answers for taxpayers is a full judicial inquiry into the gas plant scandal. Would you agree and support one today?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I'm going to answer your question, but I want to just say, first of all, thank you to the five new members for introducing a moment of harmony into the Legislature, and welcome them to this august place. I look forward to working with all of you, absolutely.

Mr. Speaker, I just want to remind the Leader of the Opposition that, in fact, the August net job numbers were up 43,600 in Ontario, and across the country the jobs were up 59,000, so in fact, the bulk of the net new jobs in the country were here in Ontario. I'm very proud of that, and we are doing everything in our power to keep that trend in place.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Tim Hudak: I can't believe, Speaker, that the Premier calls that a turnaround. I call that a miserable failure when a million people today have no job to go to. They want to make ends meet for their families. That's why we brought a plan forward to actually get our economy moving again, to create jobs and to hold this government to account for its waste of taxpayers' money. There's not a single jobs item on the agenda here today.

Here's what's troublesome: Instead of working on jobs and the economy, you continue to try to bury information around the gas plant scandal, including allegations of an attempt to intimidate the Speaker of the assembly, an attempt by Liberal staffers to put the Speaker "on notice" to keep documents out of scrutiny for the public. Surely people have been fired. Surely you've taken this cause up. What can you tell us, Premier, about this attempt to intimidate the Speaker to bury gas plant files?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Mr. Speaker, let me talk about what we've been doing this summer in terms of travelling the province and making investments. We've put in place \$17.6 million to support business in regions across the province. That has leveraged over \$133 million in investments, and it has helped to create nearly 2,800 jobs.

We launched our youth jobs strategy, Mr. Speaker, as the Leader of the Opposition well knows. We're going to be investing \$295 million to make sure that young people have the opportunity to have placements and to have co-

op programs and to start jobs. Part of that fund is an entrepreneurship fund; we've launched that.

We're increasing the employer health tax exemption, and the Leader of the Opposition should know that that is going to help small business and allow them to hire more people. That's job creation strategy.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock, please.

I do want to offer the Leader of the Opposition a small caution, and that is that there is an issue before this House under a privilege request for my investigation, so I would ask him to stay away from that particular topic while I deal with that issue, before it's live in the House right now. So I would defer to him.

Mr. Tim Hudak: Speaker, the fact that there's a point-of-privilege motion of this seriousness shows that something has gone dramatically off the rails when it comes to the Liberal government.

Premier, respectfully, you said you'd be different. You've now been Premier for almost nine months—

Interjection.

1100

Mr. Tim Hudak: —eight months—and you've failed that. In fact, the cover-up continues to happen. This is not a time for hand holding; it's not a time for kicking it down the road. It is time for action. It is time for a judicial inquiry, it is time for the truth and it is time to expose those who try to intimidate a Speaker of the assembly.

Premier, don't you agree? What action will you take, and will you call a full judicial inquiry?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I thought the Leader of the Opposition was talking about a job strategy. That was the answer I was giving, because I think that is what people in the province are focused on. They want to know that those 43,600 net new jobs in Ontario are a result of work that we've been doing for the last eight months. I'm quite clear that government works to put the conditions in place so that the private sector can create those jobs. That's the work that we've been doing.

On the issue of the relocation of the gas plants, which is the fixation across the aisle, what I have said and what we have done since I came into office as Premier is that we have opened up the process. We have made it clear that as questions are asked, they will be answered. We've provided thousands of pages of documents. We will continue to provide the answers to the questions that are asked.

PUBLIC TRANSIT

Mr. Tim Hudak: Back to the Premier: You'll recall that on March 6 of last year, the Ontario PC caucus brought forward a motion to build subways in the city of Toronto, and specifically in that motion, subways to Scarborough. We simply believe that world-class cities build underground—they build subways—and it's time to treat Scarborough residents as world-class citizens in Toronto.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Order. Leader?

Mr. Tim Hudak: So last year you voted against the subway for Scarborough. You were against subways for Scarborough; you were pro-LRT. During the election campaign you flip-flopped and, quite frankly, your Minister of Transportation has been a runaway train when it comes to making announcements that make no sense whatsoever.

Premier, why did you say one thing during the by-election, one thing last year and something completely different after the by-election? Why should we trust a word that you or your transportation minister have to say?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Be seated, please.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock. There is an old teacher trick that was used many years ago and probably still is today—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Oh, that could be arranged.

Laughter.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac):—where the person starts off real tough at the beginning and then eases off, instead of waiting to get tough at the end. I just thought I would offer you that experience that I've had. That goes for everybody.

Premier?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. What is clear is that it's this government that is committed to building transit. Since the day we came into office we've been investing in transit, and we will continue to do that. The new-found interest for transit investment on the opposite side of the House is heartening, and I look forward to working with the opposition on moving forward to build transit.

I am the first to admit that the subway—transit in Scarborough—has been an issue of contention. I was Minister of Transportation when there was a serious debate about what modality was going to be built in Scarborough, and that has gone back and forth. The fact is that we need to work with the people of Scarborough; we need to work with the city council. And where we have landed is a subway in Scarborough.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary? The member for Etobicoke—Lakeshore.

Mr. Douglas C. Holyday: Mr. Speaker, before I begin I would like to thank all the members for their very warm reception this morning. I look forward to meeting you all personally.

My question is for the Premier. Madam Premier, prior to the by-election, you promised the people of Scarborough that you would put out \$1.8 billion for public transit in Scarborough. Unfortunately, after that you've now made another promise that you're going to put only \$1.4 billion forward, and we're going to have fewer stops. I would like to know why you don't think enough of the

people of Scarborough, and for that matter the people of Ontario, to put the full amount in and give these people the subway they deserve.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I welcome the member for Etobicoke–Lakeshore to the Legislature.

Just to clarify, Mr. Speaker, we committed \$1.4 billion to the construction of this project, and we also committed \$320 million for improvements to the Kennedy station, so we are following through on our commitment. I think what is critical to understand is that since 2003, since we came into office, we have been investing in transit really across the province, because the GTHA is obviously an important focal point, but we moved the gas tax out. There is gas tax that's being invested in transit across this province. We have been consistent in our support for transit and consistent in our call for a revenue stream that will allow us to build transit going forward. I hope that with a new-found passion for transit, the opposition party will work with us as we work to implement that plan and find that revenue stream so we can continue to build transit across the GTHA.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary.

Mr. Douglas C. Holyday: Premier, the people of Toronto deserve a better answer than that. I think your party knew full well that you would break your promise to the people of Scarborough. You say transit is a priority, but your only priority is keeping your faltering government alive. Faced with the risk of losing a Liberal riding, you dreamt up a plan you had no intention of paying for. Premier, will you admit that this was no more than a scheme to try to save a seat in Scarborough?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: So, Mr. Speaker, the fact is that I know the history of this conversation pretty well because I was Minister of Transportation starting in 2010. We have been committed to building transit in Scarborough since that time and before. We remain committed to building transit. It has been a contentious file, there is no doubt about that, but the fact is that we have worked with the people of Scarborough, we have worked with the city council, and there has been a lot of back and forth. The member opposite is newly from city council and he knows how contentious that debate has been, and it must be difficult for him to actually ask that question with a straight face. So I'm very pleased that we will continue to honour our commitment to build transit in Scarborough, and that is—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Prince Edward–Hastings, come to order. The member from Peterborough, come to order.

New question.

GOVERNMENT'S RECORD

Ms. Andrea Horwath: I also want to begin by congratulating the five new members who took their seats this morning and share with all of their friends and rela-

tives, who are either here or watching, the excitement that they have and the pride that they have in those people. Congratulations to everyone.

My first question is to the Premier. Over the summer all of us had an opportunity to hear from Ontarians, both on the campaign trail and off. They told us pretty clearly that they're worried about keeping good jobs, ensuring that health care is there for them when they need it and keeping up with the bills in tough times. More importantly, they are tired of hearing promises of change and seeing the same old status quo. Has the Premier gotten the message that people need to see results?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I absolutely concur with the leader of the third party that what we need to be doing is making investments in people, making investments in infrastructure and supporting business so that they can create jobs, which is why I am very pleased that in August the jobs numbers were up 43,600 in Ontario. It's why I'm so pleased that we've been able to commit \$17.6 million to support business and regional economies; that we have launched the youth jobs strategy that I know the leader of the third party is very keen on, and that we're dealing with the employer health tax exemption, which will allow employers to hire more people. Those are real changes, Mr. Speaker. Those are the kinds of things that are getting results already.

1110

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Well, Speaker, I would put to the Premier that part-time service sector jobs are nothing to crow about these days in Ontario. The measures that we put on the agenda in the spring will ensure that seniors are not left waiting for home care, that young people get the good jobs that they need, and that all of us have real accountability on government spending.

But we have a lot of work to do if this is going to be anything other than more promises from a Liberal government desperate to hold on to power. For example, Ontario's wealthiest corporations will be getting a brand new HST loophole on meals and entertainment pretty soon. Now, last spring, the government said that they wanted this loophole closed. Have they done anything about it, Speaker?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I think the leader of the third party knows that this is not a loophole, and we've talked about this many times in the Legislature. The Minister of Finance has written to the federal finance minister to work to rationalize this. I think the leader of the third party knows that what we are doing here on this side of the House, in fact, with the help of her party in getting the budget passed, is making those investments supporting business so that those businesses can create the jobs that are needed in the province, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, with all due respect, what I do know is that people are tired of the same old status quo that they've seen for the past 10 years coming from the Liberal government. They told us very clearly

that they want to see results that make their lives better this session, and we're going to be working hard to deliver those results.

For example, drivers paying the highest auto insurance rates in the country are wondering how long they're going to have to wait for their rates to actually come down. They see the government working overtime to protect insurance industry profits, but moving as slowly as possible when it comes to lowering their auto insurance rates. Can the Premier explain why it is that the government's dragging their feet on lowering the rates while it continues to protect industry profit margins?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: The leader of the third party asked a number of questions and touched on a number of issues in her questioning, and I know that there are ministers who will want to speak specifically to some of those issues. But I just want to make this point, and that is that I am determined to continue to work to make the minority Parliament function so that we can get results, so that we can make the changes that need to be changed and so that we can bring the legislation in that needs to be passed, Mr. Speaker.

I look forward to working with the leader of the third party on issues like auto insurance, on which we're not dragging our feet; in fact, we're implementing the changes that will allow those average decreases to happen. We look forward to working with the third party on making sure that those investments in home care happen, Mr. Speaker. We look forward to working with the third party and with the opposition on the changes to, for example, the employer health tax exemption, so that businesses will have more room to hire people. That's the work of the Legislature. I look forward to working with the opposition members on that.

MEMBERS' PRIVILEGES

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My next question is also for the Premier. I really look forward to change, and people keep hearing promises of change. But over the summer, they saw more and more of the same old same old from the Liberal government.

Way back in January, New Democrats proposed a public inquiry to look into the gas plant scandal. But the Premier insisted that a legislative committee would do a better job. This morning, she actually insisted again that all the answers were going to be gotten by that committee. She insisted it would have a full scope to ensure that all questions were answered back in January as well, Speaker. Can the Premier explain why, then, the committee Chair, the Liberal MPP from Etobicoke North, is blocking questions at committee?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I think the leader of the third party knows that that is not what is happening and that the Chairs of committees take their advice from the Clerks, Mr. Speaker, and they act in accordance with that advice.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Well, Speaker, Ontarians judge leaders by what they do, not just what they say. They see New Democrats have been delivering results that will make government more accountable, and they see Liberals trying to stop Ontarians from getting answers about the gas plants.

On August 13, the Premier said she was "surprised" that MPPs weren't being allowed to ask about senior Liberal staff. Will the Premier direct her government House leader to agree to expand the mandate of the justice committee so that Ontarians can get answers about attempts by senior Liberals to influence the Speaker?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I know the House leader is going to want to comment on this question in the next supplementary, but let me just say I'm very pleased that we were able to get the budget passed in this Legislature. I'm very pleased that the NDP were able to support the Liberal budget—that the NDP were able to support the initiatives of this government to invest in home care, to invest in a youth jobs strategy and to invest in transit. I'm very pleased that the third party was able to see that the people of this province sent a minority government to Queen's Park, and that they are working with us—have been working with us—to make that work.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Order, please.

I do want to offer the leader of the third party the same advice that I offered the leader of the official opposition, and that is this: There is a live issue before this House right now in dealing with the *prima facie* case regarding the issue that you brought up, so I'm asking that you refrain from asking questions about that particular issue. I'm just offering that as a caution, please.

Final supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, this is about her leadership, not the leash that she has her House leader on.

On August 13, the Premier said, "I was surprised" that the questions were out of order. "I fully expected those questions"—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock. Order.

Interjections.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Is that leash leather?

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Renfrew, come to order. I'm not impressed.

Please put your question.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: On August 13, the Premier said, "I was surprised" that the questions were out of order. "I fully expected those questions could be asked." The Premier herself has promised that all questions would be answered. Now, she can keep her word and do the right thing now, or she can continue to protect well-connected Liberal insiders. Will the Premier do the right thing and get Ontarians answers, or will she let the same old status quo stand?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Mr. Speaker, thank you. It is day 1—just noting.

I just want to note, Mr. Speaker, that the quote that the leader of the third party has read out a couple of times—that I was surprised—demonstrates that I don’t control what goes on in committee. So when something happens and I’m asked a question, I respond honestly to the question.

We all want the information out. We want to continue to be open. I wrote to the Auditor General; I asked that the Auditor General look at both situations. There are 135,000 documents that have been provided to the committee.

The leader of the third party knows this. I really believe she knows that it is my intention—it has been our intention all along—to make sure that, as questions are asked, they get answered, and we will continue in that manner.

MEMBERS’ PRIVILEGES

Mr. Jim Wilson: My question is also for the Premier. Premier, over the summer, my colleagues and NDP colleagues were prevented at the justice committee from asking very important and pertinent questions about your Liberal operatives—senior Liberal staffers—attempting to strong-arm the Speaker after his decision in finding a *prima facie* case of contempt against your government in the gas plant scandal.

So I want to know why you weren’t forthcoming with that information, that the meeting had taken place and had put the Speaker in such a terrible position—so no transparency; you said you were going to be transparent, but you’re not.

Secondly, why did we have to find out by scouring through thousands and thousands of secret emails that the meeting did take place between the Speaker and senior staffers?

Thirdly, what have you done to take action to make sure that your senior staff people, that Liberal campaign people, will be prevented in the future—and this will never happen again—from inserting politics and trying to influence rulings of an impartial Speaker?

Interjections.

1120

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock, please. Be seated, please. Again, I’m very much wanting quiet so I can hear the statement. I’m very concerned about the direction when there’s a live issue that will be dealt with. I am sensitive to the questioning, so I’m trying to be as balanced as possible, and that’s why I’m asking all members who are asking those kinds of questions to try to divert themselves from making mention of the Chair while the Chair is supposed to be making a ruling. If you can find a way to do that and everyone would be listening while I’m speaking, it would be helpful. I’m leaving it with you to try to make that happen, and if not, then I will rule it out of order.

Premier, you can answer.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Government House leader.

Hon. John Milloy: Mr. Speaker, it’s unfortunate that members of the opposition, including the member who just asked the question, are really playing some procedural games here. The fact of the matter is, the Chair of the committee made a ruling, and there are a number of options that we could deal with, going forward. One was a point of privilege, of which the honourable member in question has given notice to this House and that this House is seized with. The second is for the House leaders to sit down and talk about a reasonable way to move forward.

The House leaders have met on this matter and, without divulging our confidential conversations, I can say that we looked at both. I, as House leader, would never want to be in a position of trying to horse-trade away the right of a member to raise a point of privilege. We talked about some potential ways forward, but the honourable member has chosen to raise that point of privilege. That is his right, Mr. Speaker, but then he cannot use question period to try to berate the government. He’s got to make a choice procedurally, and these types of games are quite frankly beneath him.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary? I’m allowing it.

Mr. Jim Wilson: I’m still stunned with that answer, Mr. Speaker.

Back to the Premier: Ontarians are disgusted with what happened. You know, it took Watergate a long time to be a big issue. This, in parliamentary circles, is a huge issue. You do not do what your people attempted to do. It’s not whether the Speaker was influenced or not; it’s the attempt to strong-arm the Speaker while a ruling was going on.

Email exchanges between these Liberal staffers and advisers have raised a lot of eyebrows with members of this House and with the public. You want to be open; you want to be transparent. The people of Ontario want you to be open and transparent, and they want the answers. You won’t, because the House leader hasn’t brought forward a motion we could all agree on to expand the mandate of the justice committee so that we could ask these process questions leading up to the Speaker’s ruling.

At the end of the day I ask you, what are you going to do to correct things; and secondly, has anyone been fired over this?

Hon. John Milloy: Again, Mr. Speaker, it really is beneath this member. He knows that with a point of privilege before this House we could not explore any other way forward. I was not in a position to ever want to horse-trade away the right of a member to raise a point of privilege. I did, without breaking the confidentiality of House leaders, offer a potential way to move forward, and we know by the actions of the member that that was rejected.

The fact of the matter, Mr. Speaker, is that the Chair of the committee made a ruling based on his best advice. I understand that later in the session a technical briefing was offered by the Chair and the Clerk and other experts. And do you know what I found surprising, Mr. Speaker?

The opposition tried to have it in camera, in secret, so that the press and the public could not realize that this was a ruling that was based upon the legal advice that was received by the Chair of the committee at the time.

Mr. Speaker, we will hear the point of privilege, and you, sir, will deal with it.

JOB CREATION

Ms. Peggy Sattler: Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Premier. On Friday, people in London West received some discouraging news, with the release of the latest jobs numbers. Compared to a year ago, there are 5,800 fewer people in the London labour market. That's people who have given up all hope of finding work and have just stopped looking.

Premier, taking away people's hope that they will ever be able to earn a living is no solution to high unemployment rates. When is the government going to take real action to create jobs in London West?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Economic Development, Trade and Employment.

Hon. Eric Hoskins: Of course we are working hard to create jobs right across this province. In fact, I was in the London area just last week, making some announcements with the Southwestern Ontario Development Fund—important announcements in places like Palmerston, Guelph and Elmira. I'm working closely with the leadership of London.

It's important to recognize that, although there are provincial disparities in terms of job numbers, we saw in August, as the Premier mentioned, overall 43,000 new jobs created. Let's drill down a little bit in that and what that means because some are asking about the quality of those jobs. We actually saw that there were 7,600 new manufacturing jobs created in August alone. There were an additional 13,300 jobs created among our youth. We have an important youth jobs strategy that's contributing to that.

I'll speak more about the measures we're taking in the supplementary.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Peggy Sattler: Mr. Speaker, the reality is that London has lost 4,600 jobs compared to a year ago, and people in London West are worried about being able to pay the bills. The Southwestern Ontario Development Fund was established to help businesses create jobs, yet the only thing Londoners got from the fund recently was a by-election reannouncement of 14 jobs that had already been announced earlier.

Again, my question is to the Premier. When can the people of London West expect to see the fund bring some desperately needed new jobs into the London economy?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: Of course I look forward to applications coming from London and the London area, as we've already seen. Armo Tool is another example in a riding immediately adjacent, but there are a number of people from London who work at that firm. We've pro-

vided them with support, a grant through the Southwestern Ontario Development Fund.

In fact, even though this fund has only existed since October—and I know it's a fund that the PC opposition voted against. But since October alone, this government has invested more than \$25 million in southwestern Ontario through this fund. That's more than 6,000 jobs that have been created and retained through this program. It has leveraged more than \$200 million from the private sector.

I've had a great time all summer travelling through southwestern Ontario, including London, seeing the projects, the programs that we're contributing to. Manufacturing is alive and well, and we're working with these companies as they expand and extend their global reach.

PUBLIC TRANSIT

Ms. Mitzie Jacquelín Hunter: Mr. Speaker, I am proud today to rise in this House on behalf of the people of Scarborough—Guildwood.

My question is to the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure. My constituents rely on public transit every day to get to work and from school. Improving transit is a top priority for my constituents. People in my riding across Scarborough are looking for more frequent and faster options when using public transit to get around, and they want to know who will deliver.

My colleagues the members from Scarborough Southwest, Scarborough—Agincourt, Pickering—Scarborough East, Scarborough—Rouge River and Scarborough Centre have been tireless champions for a subway in Scarborough. Premier Wynne and this government have stepped up to the plate with a plan to build a subway to Scarborough and the money to back it up. However, there seems to be the risk of more delay because other levels of government don't seem to be ready to support a Scarborough subway extension.

Speaker, we need Scarborough moving. Will the minister tell this House when a subway project will get under way in Scarborough?

Hon. Glen R. Murray: Mr. Speaker, I would first like to join my colleagues in the House to welcome five very fine Ontarians to this Legislature. This is a huge privilege, and congratulations to you and your families—and also to the other candidates who weren't successful. Congratulations to all of you.

1130

We are building a subway, Mr. Speaker. That's the first thing I'd like to say. I think this government is tired of the talk. If we've had anything about Scarborough and subways, we've had debates and we haven't had enough action, and Premier Wynne has asked that I make sure this project gets built on budget and on time. The total budget for this is actually more like \$1.8 billion because we have \$320 million in the common components in the project. We will be building, without any ask for funds from the federal or provincial government, a \$1.4-billion

subway to the Scarborough Town Centre, on budget, on time.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Mitzie Jacquelín Hunter: Thank you, Speaker, and through you, thank you to the minister for that update. I'm proud that this government continues to make public transit a priority. Ontario Liberals are transit builders. The projects being funded under the Big Move in Scarborough will be well received by the people of Scarborough-Guildwood. The investments that this government is making will help make public transit a better choice for commuters, reduce congestion on our roads and contribute to a better quality of life for Ontario families.

When my constituents talk with me about improving transit, they want to know how it's going to be done as much as they want to know what's going to be done. However, many are unfamiliar with the Big Move and Metrolinx itself, the agency responsible for implementing transit in the GTHA.

Will the minister tell this House what Metrolinx is doing to deliver on the promise of better transit for the people of Scarborough and throughout the GTHA?

Hon. Glen R. Murray: I want to thank the member again for her advocacy for her constituents. We are building \$16.4 billion in the largest regional build-out of transit in the history of the GTHA: fifteen major projects and a major new system. And 90% of that is being funded singularly by the provincial government, which is where lies the challenge.

Mr. Speaker, 4% of the funding comes from the federal government—a measly 4%. In the six months that I've been the minister, I have written letters; I have had one conversation with Minister Lebel early on. I've invited him on a cycling trip. We have had nothing. Minister Raitt took over a couple of months ago. I have tried to get a meeting with her to talk about this for several weeks—for a couple of months. We actually had three different appointments in the last few weeks; she cancelled all of them. We have no support from the federal government. We have no meetings. They clearly don't care about this at all, never mind fund it.

POWER PLANTS

Mr. Victor Fedeli: My question this morning is for the Premier. Welcome back, Premier. The Liberal gas plant scandal hearings went on all summer long. The surprising thing here is, we are almost a year after the first email documents started dribbling out and we still don't know how much the Oakville gas plant cancellation was. We have one fact confirmed by the documents and by sworn testimony, and Premier, that is that you, as cabinet chair, signed the order that started this whole charade with TransCanada. Now, you either knew how much this was going to cost Ontario or you blindly signed it with no regard whatsoever to what this will do to the taxpayers or the hydro bills.

So, Premier, when you put that pen in your hand to start this whole thing off, were you thinking, "I don't know" or "I don't care"?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Government House leader.

Hon. John Milloy: Mr. Speaker, we talk about transparency. This is the Premier of the province who has asked the Auditor General to look into the Oakville situation, and I see from media reports that she is suggesting that will be out in the coming days. She said early fall. It was this Premier who went forward and asked for a broadening of the committee. She even offered a select committee, which the opposition rejected. It was this Premier who went in front of the committee and answered hundreds of questions that have been put to her both in the House and in committee.

But you know, I want to talk a little bit about transparency and that particular member. It's interesting; he was mayor of North Bay for a number of years—actually, I think eight, nine or 10 years. The Liberal research bureau asked for emails under freedom of information from his time as mayor. I look forward to sharing the response in the supplementary.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Again, to the Premier: It is pitiful that—I can guarantee you that in those emails there were no gas plant scandal documents, and I can also tell you I have no idea what the city did with my seven years of emails that I saved when I was in office.

Your Liberal operatives, Premier, would not tell us the truth during the scandal hearings this summer. Anyone watching saw the pathetic display your party put on with half-truths and misdirection, such as we've just seen from the House leader. Nobody would tell us how much you, Premier, spent to cancel the Oakville plant, but we know you already know that number. You already have the Auditor General's findings, and you know you've been caught red-handed again.

You spoke of the people's fixation with gas plants. Well, let me tell you, Premier, they are fixated. They're fed up. They're fed up with your nonsense, your deleted emails and your delay tactics. Tell us today, how much of the taxpayers' and ratepayers' money did you spend to cancel the Oakville gas plant. Tell us right now.

Hon. John Milloy: You know what, Mr. Speaker? We don't know whether there were any emails about gas plants in the honourable member's emails because this is what we heard from the deputy clerk for the town of North Bay. I quote—

Interjections.

Hon. John Milloy: You'll want to hear this: "I have now confirmed with the director of information systems and the executive assistant for the mayor"—wait for it, wait for it—"that all available emails and attachments for the mayor and his office staff from December 1, 2003, to November 30, 2010, are no longer available. Emails are only kept for a 30-day period."

You know, Mr. Speaker, the dramatics—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Order.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Order. I would ask the members to come to order. Minister of Energy, come to order. Minister of the Environment, come to order. Thank you.

Hon. John Milloy: Mr. Speaker, the point is that the dramatics and the histrionics—let's let the committee do its work. The fact of the matter is that they have heard from dozens and dozens of witnesses. They have looked for over 100,000—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. New question.

TRANSPORTATION INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr. Percy Hatfield: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you to everyone for that warm welcome this morning.

Speaker, my question is to the Premier. In late 2012, the minister responsible for infrastructure learned that the girders manufactured for the Herb Gray Parkway in Windsor did not meet code. Nevertheless, some of those girders were installed as late as January, and it was only this July that the ministry ordered a stop to the installation of girders on this vital \$1.4-billion project.

Why did this government wait until July to stop construction when it knew months earlier about the structurally unsound girders?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: Mr. Speaker, this government is pretty proud of a \$1.4-billion investment that we're making in the Windsor-Essex Parkway. This is timely because the bridge crossing—this unprecedented level of infrastructure is of huge concern to this government, and we know it is the foundation for future economic development in the Windsor-Essex area.

Mr. Speaker, as soon as I discovered that there was an issue, we acted immediately. I have now ordered an inquiry. The expert review panel is reviewing this entire matter. We acted promptly. That is an open and transparent process. They will be rising and reporting within the next 30 days, Mr. Speaker. I think all of the questions being raised will be answered.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Mr. Percy Hatfield: The government has retained a group of what it calls leading experts in structural engineering to review these unsound girders. The study was to be completed in late summer. Now we learn that the deadline for submissions has been extended to the end of September, meaning that even an interim report won't be available until sometime this winter.

When will this Legislature—when will the people of Windsor, Tecumseh and LaSalle—finally get some answers on this critical project?

1140

Hon. Glen R. Murray: Mr. Speaker, I became aware of this, as you know, in May. I immediately acted, gathered information and went to my deputy. We immediately, in June, ordered any construction to cease. We

will not open any part of the parkway until this review is complete, and we've committed to that. We're managing this in a prudent and thoughtful way.

The expert panel are the engineers who will make these determinations around compliance and around structural integrity—this is not something for politicians. When the transcripts will all be public, the committee will be reporting completely publicly and all these questions will be seen in the full report. I think it will demonstrate that certainly I, as the minister, and this government responded quickly and promptly as we came across information that caused concern.

HEALTH CARE SOINS DE SANTÉ

Mr. John Fraser: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to echo the comments of the member from Etobicoke—Lakeshore and thank everyone for their warm welcome in the Leg today. I understand it's not that way every day.

At least that's what I've been told. I'd also like to say it's an honour to rise today on behalf of the residents of Ottawa South.

My question is for the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. As our population ages, the quality and sustainability of health care is a growing concern for my constituents. Whether it's a trip to the emergency room or a visit to the family doctor, they want to know that health care services will be there for them when they need them.

I have made clear my commitment to ensure that the people of Ottawa South get the high quality of care they deserve. Could the minister speak about what we're doing to keep Ottawa healthy?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Speaker, I am very sincere in my congratulations to the new member from Ottawa South and to the other new members who have been elected to this wonderful Legislature. Congratulations to you all.

We are making important investments to improve the quality of care in Ottawa and accessibility to health care in the Ottawa area. Ten family health teams have now been established and are providing care to 140,000 people in the Ottawa area. As the member from Ottawa-Orléans knows well, we are committed to building a family health hub in Orléans to provide comprehensive primary care in Orléans. We've cut wait times in Ottawa. For example, MRI wait times at the Ottawa Hospital have been reduced by 82%, and anyone needing a hip replacement at Montfort has had their wait cut in half.

The previous government wanted to shut down Montfort Hospital. Our government has invested \$173 million in expanding and redeveloping Montfort, and just this past summer, it was certified as an academic teaching hospital. Things are getting better in Ottawa.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

M. John Fraser: La ministre de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée mentionne l'Hôpital Montfort. J'ai déjà rencontré plusieurs de mes commettants francophones d'Ottawa-Sud et je sais à quel point cet hôpital est une

véritable institution à Ottawa. Montfort offre des services de santé excellents et est un grand symbole pour la communauté francophone de ma circonscription, d'Ottawa et de l'est de l'Ontario. Monsieur le Président, est-ce que la ministre de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée pourrait m'en dire plus sur ce que le gouvernement fait pour les francophones d'Ottawa, en plus de ce qui a été fait pour l'Hôpital Montfort?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: To the minister responsible for francophone affairs.

L'hon. Madeleine Meilleur: Moi aussi, je voudrais féliciter mon collègue John Fraser pour son élection. C'est un homme extraordinaire, un grand ami de la francophonie. C'est un homme qui a beaucoup aidé à l'avancement de l'Hôpital Montfort. Alors, je veux le remercier.

Oui, ce gouvernement ici a été extraordinaire envers les Franco-Ontariens. L'hôpital qui devait fermer ses portes, il y a quelques années sous le gouvernement précédent, je dis toujours, s'est relevé de ses cendres et on a doublé le nombre de lits à l'hôpital. Tout récemment j'avais l'honneur et le bonheur d'annoncer la désignation de l'Hôpital Montfort comme un hôpital enseignant. Vous savez que l'Hôpital Montfort, c'est mon alma mater; j'ai fait mes cours d'infirmière là. J'étais très touchée et je remercie la ministre de m'avoir donné cette opportunité-là de faire l'annonce. Merci.

POWER PLANTS

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: If I may, just before I speak, I want to congratulate all of the new members of this assembly: obviously, Mr. Fraser from the same city as me, and Doug Holyday to our new bench, and also to the others. It's great to have you here.

My question is to the Premier. Premier, you and I have asked and answered, or I've tried to get answers from you, on a number of occasions, almost 40 direct questions from me on what the true costs of those cancelled gas plants are, and I haven't been able to get that response from you. But I do know you do have that information because the auditor's report has been given to you in advance. The residents of Nepean–Carleton would truly appreciate it once and for all if you would provide us in this assembly with the full details and the true costing of what those cancelled gas plants are. You've had all summer to do it. Will you do it today?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I know my colleagues will want to comment in the supplementary.

I do not have the auditor's report, Mr. Speaker. I do not know what the auditor's report is going to say. When the auditor's report is available, it will become public.

Mr. John Yakabuski: We were promised it before we came back.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: We were promised it before we came back, Speaker.

I want to go back to the Premier. I have no interest in hearing the spin lines from the government House leader. The abuse of tax dollars to what could be to the tune of

\$1 billion that has been misspent is a serious matter. That is why our leader is calling for a judicial inquiry so justice will be served and the severity of this matter will be studied in the full view and the full attention of the public.

Premier, we need a full inquiry now, but we also need the full set of numbers. We know that you have them. We know that you've had them for quite some time. Will you make that known to us today? I appeal to you on behalf of all Ontarians and in particular the residents of Nepean–Carleton.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I will say to the member opposite that just repeating an untrue statement does not make it true. I do not have the numbers. I do not have the Auditor General's report. When I have the Auditor General's report, it will be shared with you. I do not have those numbers.

Mr. Speaker, I asked the Auditor General to look at the two situations. I went to committee and answered questions, and I opened up the scope of the committee so that those questions could be asked. I repeat, Mr. Speaker: I do not have the Auditor General's report. I have not seen it. I do not have those numbers, and when they are available, the member opposite will be able to see them.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock, please.

I've been challenged a few times today to try to bring us to focusing on how we should be asking and responding to questions and also what we should be doing in between that time.

I'm challenged by the way you responded by saying it's untrue, so let's try to be as succinct as possible with this. I'm making an observation about what I'm hearing. I haven't made a challenge to anyone other than to challenge us to race to the top instead of the bottom. Let's try to keep this on a high level, please. I'm satisfied with that, and I'm just making a comment.

New question.

PUBLIC TRANSIT

Mr. Rosario Marchese: The question is for the Premier. The Premier once talked about the need to work with the city of Toronto on transit as part of the conversation, as she is fond of saying, so why has she sent the Minister of Transportation to cause chaos and division by announcing a cut-down Scarborough subway plan with no buy-in from city council, no buy-in from the TTC or apparently even Metrolinx, the government's own transit planners?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: I want to be very clear about this, Mr. Speaker. There has been, if you look at the maps, one way only and one route only between the Kennedy station and Scarborough Town Centre. It is the route we are proceeding with. It is the route that was there today; it was the route that was there three years ago. It is the route. It has never changed. This govern-

ment has never proposed an alternate route to do that. What we are changing is the technology. The technology is changing from an LRT to a subway.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Renfrew, come to order.

1150

Hon. Glen R. Murray: There are a number of members of my caucus—Messrs. Balkissoon, Berardinetti and Duguid and others—who have fought for 20 years to get a subway. Mitzie Hunter ran on it, Mr. Speaker. We are paying 100% of the cost of that.

Not only do we have collaboration with the city; Minister Duguid and Councillor Thompson are co-chairing a committee to develop and elaborate this project and others going forward, which I think is an unprecedented level of co-operation between our two governments.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Speaker, the minister's latest plan has been widely panned as half-baked, politically driven and perhaps even physically impossible. Why is the minister playing railroad tycoon and taking potshots at supposed partners instead of working collaboratively with the city of Toronto to improve transit to Scarborough residents?

Hon. Glen R. Murray: I could take a great deal of lessons on potshots from some of my friends at city hall and in Ottawa, like Mr. Flaherty and Mr. Ford—I certainly have had a lot from them. The only two points we've made were not potshots. The two points we made of our colleagues in the other governments—and I don't speak of the whole city but some politicians there who are champions but not funders.

Four per cent as a contribution to our economic and social capital of this country's transit needs is laughable. Mr. Speaker, I've been the mayor of another city. I would never have accepted less than a third. The mayor of Kitchener doesn't accept less than a third; the mayor of Ottawa doesn't accept less than a third. I hope his federal counterparts will start raising this issue. The city has yet to put five cents into a subway. So, Mr. Speaker, we again find ourselves as the only people funding our promises and delivering our promises.

My question is, what route? Does the NDP want to change the route? Do they not like the route that's been there for four years? What is their position? How are they going to fund this? What did Mr. Giambrone promise the people of Scarborough-Guildwood?

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Grant Crack: My question is to the Minister of Economic Development, Trade and Employment. Our 2013 budget is about creating jobs and helping people in their everyday lives. Speaker, any economist will tell you that an effective regional support program will play a significant role in supporting businesses and communities, helping them grow and create good, meaningful jobs. With Ontario back on track after the global

recession, it's still important to provide economic supports to rural regions across this province to ensure economic growth and prosperity.

Speaker, through you to the Minister of Economic Development, Trade and Employment, could the minister please update this House about the action our government is taking to provide regional economic development supports for businesses across Ontario and in Glengarry-Prescott-Russell, for example?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: Thank you to the member from Glengarry-Prescott-Russell for such an important question.

Mr. Speaker, my colleague is correct when he says that Ontario is back on track, so much so that we have recovered over 180% of the jobs that were lost during the recession, more than 475,000 jobs; 90% of those jobs full-time, 80% of those jobs in the private sector. A lot of that has to do with commitments made through our Southwestern Ontario Development Fund and the important Eastern Ontario Development Fund, which we have committed almost \$90 million in support for so far. These investments have not only created and retained more than 20,000 jobs; they've leveraged private sector investment of nearly \$1 billion.

Our government's commitment to promoting such regional economic development remains a priority. In fact, as I mentioned earlier, just last week I was in Elmira, in Palmerston, in Guelph, announcing \$3 million of investments creating a considerable number of jobs and retaining them as well.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Grant Crack: Thank you, Minister, for your response. It's great to hear that our government is working to support businesses across the province and leveraging investments for growth, such as in my own riding of Glengarry-Prescott-Russell: Beau's beers is expanding, and Holder Tractors is expanding as well.

While providing supports is important, rural Ontario communities face unique challenges when it comes to employment. For example, what may work here in Toronto does not necessarily work for the rest of rural Ontario or for other rural ridings across this great province.

I recognize the importance of helping people find good jobs in their home communities. This will help keep Ontario diverse, while contributing to the lives of those who may not live in major urban areas.

Speaker, through you, again, to the Minister of Economic Development, Trade and Employment, could the minister please update this House on what our government is doing to help everyday Ontarians in all regions of Ontario find good-quality jobs?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: This is, in fact, a great opportunity to let the Legislature know about our government's recent expansion of the boundaries for our regional economic development funds and how this will further help to create jobs in local communities across the province. The Southwestern Ontario Development Fund will now include the county of Simcoe, Mr. Speaker, and the Eastern Ontario Development Fund will now include the district of Muskoka.

I have to say, I want to congratulate the local municipal and regional leaders of those two areas for working so diligently and closely with my ministry to make that possible. By expanding these geographic boundaries, we're helping businesses, not-for-profit organizations and municipalities in both Simcoe and Muskoka apply for funding for projects that will spur innovation, attract investment and create good local jobs.

Growing up, of course, as I did, in rural Ontario, I understand just how important regional economic development programs are, and economic development generally, for rural Ontario. I'm sure my colleague feels the same for his constituents.

POWER PLANTS

Mr. John Yakabuski: My question is for the Premier. Premier, it's been two years since your government's self-serving decision to cancel the Mississauga gas plant in the dying days of the 2011 election. For two years, your party has done its best to obstruct, delay and avoid coming clean with the taxpayers about how much this is going to cost them.

Despite being under oath, one Liberal operative after another, when called in front of the committee, has put on their best Sergeant Schultz impression. When you appeared before the same committee, you also refused to answer a question put to you 32 times.

The committee's summer hearings left us with a whole lot more questions, not answers. You're on the record as saying that you want the answers to come out and that you have heard the public's anger loud and clear. Will you finally let us get to the bottom of this scandal, end this charade and call a judicial inquiry?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: The Minister of Energy.

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: We certainly appreciate the question.

I recall, in the month of April at the justice committee, the CEO of the Ontario Power Authority was a witness, and at that particular meeting, he presented his best cut at the cost of Oakville. We also had a number put forward by the opposition critic as his best cut for the cost. There was also an independent consultant who put his number forward for the best cut at the cost of that particular project. Three weeks earlier, the CEO of the OPA had given a different cost for that project.

If there was no other evidence, Mr. Speaker, that we need the Auditor General to report and to have the patience to wait for her and that office, that's where it should be. That's where the answer will come. It won't come from one committee meeting where four people are giving four different answers. They're wasting time at the committee. We want to get on with the business of this Legislature. Let the Auditor General do her job.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. John Yakabuski: A lot of bluster, a lot of excuses, no answers.

Premier, the obstructionist tactics by Liberal Party operatives are well established. They have memory lapses. They claim that sworn testimony by other wit-

nesses in front of the committee is false. They dispute unequivocal evidence contained in the released documents.

You claim you want to have the questions answered, but your actions betray your true intentions. It is clear that your Liberal government has no interest in the truth. Your attempts to pay lip service to transparency have been exposed, and nobody believes you anymore.

The only way to restore public confidence and get to the bottom of this scandal is to call a judicial inquiry. Why won't you do this? What are you hiding?

1200

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: Mr. Speaker, there is a statement here, and the question is, who said this: "The cost of a public inquiry is excessive; we don't believe that that's necessary"? Well, that's from MPP Leone, MPP for Cambridge. What's changed between then and now?

Mr. Speaker, I can only repeat that the justice committee has gone up and down on this issue a hundred times. They've got different answers. The Premier had the leadership capacity to say, "Let the Auditor General look into it. Let the Auditor General come back and report." We did it for Mississauga; we accepted the report. We're doing it for Oakville; we'll accept the report.

NORTHERN ONTARIO

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is for the Premier. Last week, the Premier skipped around the north on a whistle stop tour, but her government isn't going anywhere on issues that actually matter to northerners. She hasn't delivered on the twice-promised, twice-cancelled conversion of the Thunder Bay Generating Station. In fact, northerners have watched as the Liberal government blew over half a billion dollars cancelling gas plants in southern Ontario and as they blew \$20 million cancelling the Thunder Bay gas plant conversion twice.

Now, northerners are asking themselves what's going on here. They need results, and they don't need photo ops and endless conversations. My question is a pretty basic one, Speaker: When can the people of the northwest expect some clear answers about their energy future?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Well, I have to say that my experience of being in the northwest was that people were pretty darned happy about the Experimental Lakes Area—that the provincial government has stepped up when the federal government abdicated its responsibility. I have to say, \$100 million a year for roads and bridges, that kind of infrastructure investment, was a direct request that came from municipal leaders, many of them in the northwest.

So, Mr. Speaker, what I have to say is that I did spend time in the north; I did travel the province this summer. The result of that travel—my travel in the past and this summer—is that the needs and concerns of regions in the province make their way to our policy discussions. That results in better outcomes for the people of the province. So I was happy to be there, and I will be happy to go again.

MEMBERS' PRIVILEGES

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): On August 14, the member from Simcoe—Grey provided me with written notice of his intention to raise a point of privilege upon resumption of the House. I am now prepared to give my ruling without hearing further from the member from Simcoe—Grey, as standing order 21(d) permits me to do.

The member's point of privilege relates to the existence of certain emails that were recently produced to the Standing Committee on Justice Policy in connection with that committee's review of the gas plants issue generally and my September 13, 2012, ruling specifically. These emails chronicle a discussion among a number of then-current and former staff of Premier McGuinty's office and are offered by the member from Simcoe—Grey as evidence that an attempt was made to influence or intimidate me with respect to my ruling arising from the point of privilege put forward on August 27, 2012, by the member for Cambridge.

As I have said in a public statement on July 30, I cannot speak to the mindset or the motivation of the authors of these emails. However, I think it is critical to note that my ruling that a *prima facie* case of privilege had been established by the member for Cambridge was made on September 13, 2012—fully eight days before the emails in question here.

I can tell the House that I made the September 13 ruling without any interference from any person, based on the evidence and arguments put forward to me by various members of this assembly, based on the August 27, 2012, report of the estimates committee, and in consultation with only my procedural advisers at the table. At no time did any person seek to pressure me with respect to that ruling, and, it having been made, it was not changeable in any event; this simply was not possible.

As I also noted in my July 30 public statement, I meet and have discussions regularly on a wide variety of issues related to my duties and responsibilities as Speaker. I am sure that all members can appreciate the extreme reluctance I would have in divulging the topic or content of any of those discussions, for many of them take place with you and your colleagues. To do so would justifiably open me up to a criticism that I cannot be trusted to keep confidences, regardless of whether they are of great or minor importance.

However, given the serious nature of the matter at hand, and in what I judge to be in the best interests of this institution, I am prepared to say that at no time, in any discussion I might have had after delivering my September 13 ruling, was I the recipient of any inappropriate overture or suggestion. I have not been pressured, intimidated, cajoled, warned or threatened in any way, nor was any influence exerted upon me to do or say any particular thing or to pursue any particular course of action. Nothing of this nature has taken place.

It is because I can so clearly give this House this assurance that I must find that a *prima facie* case of privilege does not exist. I thank the member from Simcoe—

Grey for providing me with a comprehensive notice in this matter.

USE OF QUESTION PERIOD

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke on a point of order.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Speaker, earlier today in the answer given to the member from Nipissing, the government House leader delved into areas that I believe are inappropriate for this House to even be considering. I look at standing orders 23(h), (i) and (m) as my justification for raising this point of order.

The question at hand put to the Premier at the time and answered by the government House leader is to deal with the issue of the gas plant cancellation—matters that were dealt with by this Legislature, by this government, by the Liberal Party. For this House leader to go down the road of trying to make a mockery of what we do in this House by talking about FOIs to the city of North Bay to look for emails that go back years from someone who's no longer a member of that city council, let alone the mayor, and to bring and raise those issues into this House takes us down an area that we are not responsible for. It is not the job of the Legislature of Ontario to be looking for emails from the city of North Bay. Secondly, it is absolutely certain that any emails from the city of North Bay would have nothing to do with the cancellation of gas plants in Mississauga or Oakville.

That is an insult to the members of this Legislature. It is an insult to the public, the people of the province of Ontario, to play those kinds of games, and I would hope that any question of that nature in the future that is responded to in that silly, ridiculous way by the government House leader is immediately ruled out of order.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I thank the member for his point of order. I honestly believe that it actually would be helpful to this House if all members would refrain from making any personal comments to anyone about anything they've done in the past, present or future.

I would also suggest very strongly that all members give serious consideration to speaking to the Speaker when responding to and asking questions. That would help us remove ourselves from the noted comments from the member from Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke. I thank him for his comments and I charge all of us with taking that path as much and as often as possible.

There are no deferred votes. This House stands recessed until 1 p.m. this afternoon.

The House recessed from 1208 to 1300.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

WIND TURBINES

Mr. Ted Arnott: Today, the first day of the fall sitting of the Legislature, we begin again to discuss, debate and

deliberate the public issues facing the province. We might even have the occasional conversation, to use the Premier's favourite word for a dialogue that usually leads nowhere. A genuine conversation must be two-way. Both sides must listen and show respect for each other, and normally the conversation should have a conclusion if it's going to be anything but a waste of everyone's time.

On August 14, along with the members of the opposed Belwood wind farm group and residents of West Garafraxa in the township of Centre Wellington, I attended a meeting in Elora hosted by wpd Canada, a wind energy company which is planning to build a wind farm near Belwood. This particular conversation was initiated by the McGuinty Liberal government's Green Energy Act. Today, it is perpetuated by the Wynne Liberal government. The anger in the room was palpable. The representatives of wpd took the brunt of it because, of course, no one from the Liberal government would have dared to show up at a meeting such as this. But shown up these Liberal scoundrels should be, for it is their policy to take away local decision-making authority, move ahead prematurely while health studies have yet to be completed, and arbitrarily decide that a setback of 500 metres is sufficient, all the while driving up hydro bills and driving out industry, which is the root of the problem.

This is the legacy of their Green Energy Act. No wonder the Liberal support in rural Ontario has all but disappeared. But the voice of rural Ontario will continue to be heard here at Queen's Park from this side of the House, and the conversation will only conclude when the Liberals are removed from office.

TEMPORARY EMPLOYMENT AGENCIES

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Today, I rise to discuss the issue of temporary job agencies. All too often, Mr. Speaker, many members of the community around Ontario and particularly in Brampton and Mississauga are finding precarious employment. That's employment that's not permanent. This type of employment often sees people face conditions that are much worse than other people's. There's a strong connection between precarious employment and poverty, and the root cause is that people who don't have a guaranteed source of income, who don't have an employment that they can rely on, often fall through the cracks.

This government has for too long been inactive on this file. There is a serious problem brewing, there's a serious problem that exists, and we need the government to take action to address this issue of precarious employment. We need to see some regulations in place so that people are transitioned from precarious employment from these temporary jobs into permanent, full-time jobs.

I have numerous examples of folks who are working through these agencies. There was a time when they would be transitioned into a full-time job, but people are now working, for year after year, through temporary agencies. They get no benefits; they have no severance pay. They do not have the same rights as those who have full-time, permanent employment.

Again I urge this government to take steps and to take real actions to address this issue, which is one of the root causes of poverty that addresses the working poor in our community. We need to give them some solace and some security that we are standing for them to ensure they get permanent, full-time jobs.

STREETSVILLE CEILIDH

Mr. Bob Delaney: On Saturday, September 21, the vibrant village of Streetsville invites everyone to the third annual Streetsville Ceilidh. The phrase "ceilidh" is of Irish and Scottish descent. Ceilidh is a Gaelic phrase meaning "party" or "gathering" at which song and dance is accompanied by storytelling.

In North America, some 50 million of us have descended from Gaelic ancestry, mostly from Ireland and Scotland. While Mississauga celebrates the heritage of our neighbours from all over the world, the annual Streetsville Ceilidh is an opportunity for the whole community to become Gaelic for a night and to join between 400 and 500 of us to celebrate, eat and be merry.

The Streetsville Ceilidh will be held at Vic Johnston Arena on Saturday, September 21, 2013. Doors open at 6 p.m.; the celebration runs until 1 p.m. Tickets are merely \$50 per person, with the option to reserve tables of six, eight, or 10. Each ticket includes dinner and a chance at a door prize raffle, plus live entertainment throughout the evening. The best part: All the evening's net proceeds come back to the western Mississauga community to help kids through local service groups: the Legion, the Rotary Club, the Lions and the Streetsville Hockey League.

HATE CRIMES

Mr. Peter Shurman: I am very saddened to rise today to speak to an important, distressing and rapidly increasing problem which we in Ontario have been encountering. Over the past weeks, residents in Thornhill, Richmond Hill and even myself here at Queen's Park have been the victims of hatred, discrimination and anti-Semitism.

On Wednesday August 14, the Richmond Hill Golf and Country Club, which is known to have a high Jewish membership, was targeted with two nasty swastikas cut into the grass of the golf greens. Only a week later, four homes in Thornhill had their vehicles vandalized, with the Nazi symbol spray-painted on their hoods.

Because of my own religious persuasion, I was the victim of personal discrimination and hateful words expressed in writing against me earlier this summer, but I cannot be more specific today.

Several years ago I stood in this chamber with many of you condemning the term "Israel Apartheid Week" as being inflammatory and speaking hatred on our university campuses. I stand before you today to report that it seems our efforts to stop hatred against any group have fallen short. I will continue to be a relentless advocate for tough sanctions when dealing with issues of hatred and racism. Canada is the ultimate mosaic, the

envy of other nations for our work in creating tolerance and full integration. Actions like these demean the legacy of thousands of Canadians who have laid the foundation for acceptance and tolerance.

With every hateful act, the words “never again” become more meaningful. We must stand our ground in Ontario and in Canada to fight against all forms of hatred perpetrated against any and all groups.

As the MPP for Thornhill and as a target of anti-Semitism myself, I strongly urge the York region police to be unrelenting and vigilant in seeking out the perpetrators of these heinous acts and to treat these incidents for exactly what they are: hate crimes. I call upon all my fellow parliamentarians to join me in the fight against hatred, intolerance and bigotry.

TWIN PINE VILLAGE CO-OP INC.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: It's my privilege to be able to share with the members of the Legislature the accomplishments of the Twin Pine Village Co-op in my riding of London—Fanshawe.

Constructed in the early 1970s, the Twin Pine Village Co-op has the distinction of being one of London's first co-op buildings, and this co-op community continues to thrive today. The initiative at Twin Pine Village introduced a new approach to housing. Over time, this project evolved into an exemplary model of community co-operation and proved to Londoners that it is possible to deliver affordable housing in a supportive and inclusive community setting.

Once built, it was up to the residents to continue to promote the philosophy of co-op housing city-wide. Residents of a co-operative have a sense of true ownership, responsibility and investment in their homes. They work together to benefit all residents.

1310

I'm delighted to announce that the Twin Pines co-op in London—Fanshawe was able to pay off their mortgage in full this past summer. I would like to congratulate the co-op residents, volunteers and board members on this achievement. They have proven that co-operative housing is effective and beneficial to residents, the community and all Londoners.

RECOVERY DAY

Mr. John Fraser: I'd like to say, once again, thanks to all the members for their warm welcome this morning. I'd like to say thank you to the residents of Ottawa South. I look forward to continuing to work hard for them both here and in Ottawa South.

On Sunday I had the pleasure of attending the first Recovery Day ever held in Ottawa. I was joined by my colleague from Nepean—Carleton, who's not here right now. The Recovery Day is a celebration that highlights the bravery, courage and dedication of people in long-term recovery, their families and the people that work with them. It also tries to remind people that there's a stigma that's often attached to long-term recovery.

I would like to offer my congratulations to Daniel Rathwell, the organizer of the event, and all the people who volunteered with him. It was a very successful event. I would like to encourage all members of this Legislature, when Recovery Day comes around next year at this time, that if there's one in their area, they participate.

FREEMAN STATION

Mrs. Jane McKenna: We frequently take our built heritage for granted, and we often realize the cost of our mistakes too late—often, but not always. Today, the city of Burlington celebrates a chapter of its history and heritage when the historic Freeman Station begins its journey back to restored glory. Starting today, the station, built in 1906 by the Grand Trunk Railway, will be gently moved from its temporary sanctuary beside the Fairview fire station to a permanent home nearby. I'm sure the people of Burlington will be taking the time to witness this historic moment.

It's a moment made possible by community volunteers who rallied around this cause and rescued the station from decades of neglect and who called themselves the Friends of Freeman Station. Since 2011, they have worked to stabilize, repurpose and relocate this piece of Burlington's history. Along the way, they have partnered with local companies to help return Freeman Station to its former condition. Companies like Ashland, Murison Restoration, King Paving, and Laurie McCulloch Building Moving have all been a huge help. But in the end, the success of this project can be chalked up to the vision, dedication and focus of the people of Burlington. Congratulations to all.

RIDING OF SCARBOROUGH—GUILDFWOOD

Ms. Mitzie Jacquelín Hunter: I'd also like to thank the members this morning for that very warm welcome. I'm pleased to join you.

I'd like to take this opportunity to thank the people of Scarborough—Guildwood for placing their faith in me and electing me to serve as their representative. I am so proud to represent Scarborough, a place where I've lived, learned and worked. I'm so proud to be here to serve my community and the people of Ontario.

I came to Canada when I was four years old with my family, including my grandmother, Eva Almira Hunter. I visited her on her birthday, August 14. She was so proud that her granddaughter had been elected as a member of the Legislative Assembly of Ontario. She passed away peacefully on August 16. I want to thank the team at the Scarborough Hospital, including Dr. Ko, for the care that she received.

I am humbled to join the 106 other MPPs in this assembly. While our experiences and opinions are widely different, I look forward to serving with you and getting to know each of you. We are working together in

common cause to make a better life for the people in communities we represent.

In my own community of Scarborough-Guildwood, we take pride in our diversity and strong cultural spirit. Scarborough-Guildwood is proudly one of the most diverse ridings in one of the most diverse provinces in the country. I know that my constituents strongly believe that we are stronger together as one community.

HIGHWAY 15

Mr. Steve Clark: I rise on behalf of the residents of north Leeds to speak about Highway 15. Frankly, I'm not sure what's worse: the deplorable condition of this major roadway or how utterly the Ministry of Transportation has bungled this improvement project since it was first identified in 1999. That's right: The journey started in 1999—and 14 years later, the stretch from Seeley's Bay to Crosby stands among the worst in Ontario.

I regularly hear from constituents fed up with paying for repairs to their vehicles. They also fear for the safety of their loved ones, their friends and their neighbours who travel the highway daily.

Among the delays was a year lost to study the project's impact on snakes and turtles. Speaker, the only endangered species I'm concerned about is the humans driving Highway 15.

Rideau Lakes Mayor Ron Holman and I were shocked to learn that MTO has shelved a commitment to finally begin the work this fall.

Minister Murray, you know Mayor Holman has requested a meeting to discuss this urgent situation. We need your personal involvement, and I'm calling on you to meet with the mayor.

I'm also extending this offer: When you pick a date, I will meet you, with Mayor Holman, in Kingston, so the three of us can drive Highway 15 to the Rideau Lakes township office in Chantry. You can experience firsthand the dangerous conditions north Leeds residents have endured for far too long and why this latest detour is unacceptable.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I beg to inform the House that, pursuant to standing order 98(c), a change has been made in the order of precedence on the ballot list for private members' public business such that Ms. Forster assumes ballot item number 61 and Mr. Schein assumes ballot item 69, and Ms. MacLeod assumes ballot item number 47 and Mr. Hudak assumes ballot item number 72.

TABLING OF SESSIONAL PAPERS

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I also beg to inform the House that, during the adjournment, the following reports from parliamentary officers were tabled:

—on June 18, 2013, a request from the member from Ottawa-Orléans, Mr. McNeely, to the Integrity Commissioner for an opinion pursuant to section 30(1) of the Members' Integrity Act, 1994, on whether the member from Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock, Ms. Scott, has contravened the act or Ontario parliamentary convention;

—on June 24, 2013, a report regarding alternative voting technologies from the Chief Electoral Officer;

—on July 15, 2013, a report concerning the Honourable Brad Duguid, the member from Scarborough Centre, from the Integrity Commissioner;

—on July 16, 2013, the 2012-13 annual report from the Ombudsman of Ontario, sessional paper number 81;

—on August 20, 2013, addendum to the special investigation report from the Information and Privacy Commissioner.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT AGENCIES

Mr. Lorenzo Berardinetti: I beg leave to present a report on agencies, boards and commissions: the Liquor Control Board of Ontario from the Standing Committee on Government Agencies, and move adoption of its recommendation.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Mr. Berardinetti presents the committee's report and moves the adoption of its recommendation.

Does the member wish to make a brief statement?

Mr. Lorenzo Berardinetti: No, thank you. I'd like to move adjournment.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Mr. Berardinetti moves adjournment of the debate. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Debate adjourned.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I beg to inform the House that, during the adjournment, the clerk received the report on intended appointments dated August 14, 2013, of the Standing Committee on Government Agencies. Pursuant to standing order 108(f)(9), the report is deemed to be adopted by the House.

Report deemed adopted.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

FINANCIAL ACCOUNTABILITY OFFICER ACT, 2013

LOI DE 2013 SUR LE DIRECTEUR DE LA RESPONSABILITÉ FINANCIÈRE

Mr. Sousa moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 95, An Act to establish a Financial Accountability Officer / Projet de loi 95, Loi créant le poste de directeur de la responsabilité financière.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member for a short statement?

Hon. Charles Sousa: Mr. Speaker, I'll make my statement during ministerial statements.

1320

RADON AWARENESS AND PREVENTION ACT, 2013

LOI DE 2013 SUR LA SENSIBILISATION AU RADON ET LA PROTECTION CONTRE L'INFILTRATION DE CE GAZ

Mr. Qaadri moved first reading of the following bill: Bill 96, An Act to raise awareness about radon, provide for the Ontario Radon Registry and reduce radon levels in dwellings and workplaces / Projet de loi 96, Loi visant à sensibiliser le public au radon, à prévoir la création du Registre des concentrations de radon en Ontario et à réduire la concentration de ce gaz dans les logements et les lieux de travail.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member for a short statement.

Mr. Shafiq Qaadri: I would simply urge all members of this House to please vote in favour of this wholly essential bill. Thank you.

MOTIONS

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

Hon. John Milloy: I seek unanimous consent to put forward a motion without notice regarding private members' public business.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Mr. Milloy seeks unanimous consent to put forth a motion without consent. Agreed? Agreed.

Hon. John Milloy: Mr. Speaker, I move that, notwithstanding standing order 98(g), notice for ballot items 34 and 35 be waived.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Motion agreed to.

COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP

Hon. John Milloy: Mr. Speaker, I believe that we have unanimous consent to put forward a motion without notice regarding committee membership.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Do we have unanimous consent to put forward? Agreed? Agreed.

Hon. John Milloy: It's a long one, Mr. Speaker. I move that, notwithstanding the order of the House dated February 20, 2013, the membership of the following committees is as follows:

The Standing Committee on Estimates: Mike Colle, Kim Craitor, Joe Dickson, Amrit Mangat, Michael Harris, Rob Leone, Rick Nicholls, Taras Natyshak, Michael Prue;

The Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs: Steven Del Duca, Kevin Flynn, Mitzie Hunter, Soo Wong, Victor Fedeli, Monte McNaughton, Peter Shurman, Catherine Fife, Michael Prue;

The Standing Committee on General Government: Donna Cansfield, Grant Crack, Dipika Damerla, John Fraser, Laurie Scott, Todd Smith, Jeff Yurek, Sarah Campbell, Peggy Sattler;

The Standing Committee on Government Agencies: Laura Albanese, Lorenzo Berardinetti, Rick Bartolucci, Mitzie Hunter, Jim McDonell, Randy Pettapiece, Lisa Thompson, Percy Hatfield, Monique Taylor;

The Standing Committee on Justice Policy: Bob Delaney, Steven Del Duca, Phil McNeely, Shafiq Qaadri, Frank Klees, Jack MacLaren, Rob Milligan, Teresa Armstrong, Jonah Schein;

The Standing Committee on Public Accounts: Lorenzo Berardinetti, Helena Jaczek, Bill Mauro, Phil McNeely, Toby Barrett, Norm Miller, Jerry Ouellette, France Gélinas, Jagmeet Singh;

The Standing Committee on Regulations and Private Bills: Donna Cansfield, Dipika Damerla, John Fraser, Monte Kwinter, Randy Hillier, Rod Jackson, Bill Walker, Peter Tabuns, John Vanthof;

The Standing Committee on Social Policy: Bas Balkissoon, Mike Colle, Vic Dhillon, Helena Jaczek, Ted Chudleigh, Ernie Hardeman, Jane McKenna, Cheri DiNovo, Paul Miller; and

The Standing Committee on the Legislative Assembly: Bas Balkissoon, Grant Crack, Vic Dhillon, Amrit Mangat, Steve Clark, Garfield Dunlop, Lisa MacLeod, Cindy Forster, Michael Mantha.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): All in favour? Agreed.

Motion agreed to.

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

FINANCIAL ACCOUNTABILITY

Hon. Charles Sousa: I'm pleased to stand in the House to introduce the Financial Accountability Officer Act, 2013. This bill, if passed, would move forward with the commitments made by our government to enhance the accountability and transparency of the province's finances. Our government is strongly committed to ensuring that we as legislators are accountable to the people of Ontario for clearly communicating the objectives, costs and benefits of proposals. The Financial

Accountability Officer Act, 2013, would further the accomplishments and build upon previous work made by this government—in introducing the financial transparency and accountability act—that we have made already on this front.

This bill would establish a Financial Accountability Officer to provide independent analysis to members of the Legislative Assembly about the state of the province's finances, including the budget, and trends in the provincial and national economies. In addition, at the request of a committee or member of the assembly, additional types of research could be undertaken by the Financial Accountability Officer, including the financial cost or benefit to the province of any public bill. The Financial Accountability Officer could also be requested to review and estimate the financial cost or benefit to the province of any proposal, such as private members' bills, or that which relates to matters over which the Legislature has jurisdiction, such as new programs. On request, all ministries and other parts of government would be required to provide the Financial Accountability Officer with financial and economic information on a timely basis.

Our government remains committed to building a strong and prosperous economy while protecting the high-quality public services that the people of Ontario expect and deserve. But at the same time, we must eliminate the deficit, and in this regard we've made great strides. Ontario has beaten its deficit targets for the past four years. We're the only government in Canada that has actually achieved this level of success. But we know we must always strive to do better. Research suggests that officers in other jurisdictions that work in similar ways to what we are proposing lead to improved forecasting, help ensure accountability in meeting their fiscal goals, and improve transparency by better informing the public. These are all laudable ends, Mr. Speaker, and a Financial Accountability Officer would help us meet them.

Ontario is leading the way as the first provincial government in Canada to propose the establishment of such an office. If passed, the Financial Accountability Officer Act, 2013, would also enhance the information and resources available to all members of the assembly.

You will recall, Mr. Speaker, that in our throne speech Premier Wynne made it clear that this government is committed to getting real work done on behalf of all the people of Ontario, and it calls upon members of this Legislature to come together in support of that goal.

This bill is an example of our commitment to making minority Parliament work in the interests of all Ontarians and demonstrates the collaborative approach we are taking to work with the opposition. We have a shared responsibility to serve with integrity, and this added level of review by an independent officer would also help provide even greater confidence to all Ontarians. That is why I'm asking for the support of the assembly on this important bill.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): It is now time for responses.

Mr. John O'Toole: It is my privilege, on behalf of our leader, Tim Hudak, and the official opposition, to respond to the minister's statement as the accountability critic.

1330

First, let me stand and explain to the taxpayers what is really expected in demanding accountability. Accountability would mean that money is available to invest in health care, education, infrastructure and the things that matter most to Ontarians. Sadly, this government's idea of fiscal accountability is too little, too late—about 10 years, in fact, and many billions of dollars. It comes too late to stop the loss of at least \$585 million—perhaps \$1 billion—in the cancellation of gas plants in Oakville and Mississauga in the cancellation of gas plants in Oakville and Mississauga. Second, with or without the Financial Accountability Office, it is too late for this government to reverse the fiasco at Ornge air ambulance. Third, it's too late to save back the billions of dollars squandered by the McGuinty-Wynne government at eHealth.

This summer, the Ontario Debt Clock, sponsored by the Canadian Taxpayers Federation, stopped in my riding of Durham and in cities across Ontario to display the facts about Ontario's growing debt. Ontarians were shocked to see that the debt is climbing at a rate of \$32 million per day. The debt stands at more than \$19,000 for every man, woman and child in this province.

Why are the members of the McGuinty-Wynne government the last people in Ontario to admit that they have a spending problem? The taxpayers do not need a second opinion. In fact, we do not need a new watchdog to tell us whether our government is accountable or not. Simply, the case has been made: They are not accountable.

If this government really cared about accountability, it would not have waffled so badly on the recommendations of the Drummond report. If this government cared about accountability, it would not have fought the fair disclosure of emails and information at the committee hearings into the gas plant cancellations. If this government cared about accountability, it would not have plunged Ontario into expensive energy policies that will result in this province having some of the highest electricity prices in North America.

Mr. Speaker, the new financial watchdog is not even the idea of the McGuinty-Wynne government. The Financial Accountability Office was a demand from the New Democrats to help seal the coalition between the Liberals and the NDP to pass the 2013 budget. The Financial Accountability Office will, in itself, cost taxpayers additional money. Estimates have pegged the annual budget at at least \$2.5 million or more.

After almost 10 years of the Liberal government and the many, many scandals that go on even as we speak, I ask the people of Ontario: Do you have any trust in this government to be accountable?

Ms. Catherine Fife: It's a pleasure to stand up in this House today following the NDP's request of this government to be more financially accountable and to ensure that the people of this province have a true assessment of

where we're spending our money and how we're spending our money.

As you will recall, we brought forward this idea of a financial accountability office during the negotiations over the 2013 budget. We were immensely proud of the idea then and we remain proud of it today. At the time, the Liberal government said that this idea was interesting. Well, we in the NDP and the people of this province think that accountability is more than interesting; we feel that it's needed, and we need an office in place to make sure that it happens.

Second of all, to respond to the PCs, it is never too late to right a wrong and it is never too late to rebuild trust. The people of this province have a serious trust issue with this government. Our idea of bringing a financial accountability office to the Legislature is not only good for us to rebuild trust but it's good for the people of this province, to ensure that we are spending their tax dollars appropriately and responsibly.

I know that as we move forward, though, we're going to make sure—myself and the member from Beaches-East York on the finance committee and the entire NDP caucus—that this piece of legislation will be working as it was originally planned to work, and that is to ensure that every dollar, moving forward, is spent responsibly.

I'd like to remind people that the Financial Accountability Office would have the ability to do an independent cost analysis at the request of MPPs. Anyone in this House can ask the FAO for the real numbers, the truth about a financial plan. Imagine, moving forward, if we had the truth on the gas plants, if we had the truth on the Ornge scandal, if we had the truth on eHealth—we would not be in the state that we are right now in this province of Ontario.

The Financial Accountability Office will be a new, independent office of the Legislature. It will bring much-needed accountability and transparency to Ontario by giving independent analysis. It will have the ability to do an independent cost-analysis for MPPs. Why any MPP in this House would not support financial accountability—I have no idea why you would not follow through on one of the most important responsibilities that we have.

The Ontario NDP are proud that this province would be the first subnational government to have a Financial Accountability Officer. I am looking forward to the debate on this legislation in this House and in committee, and I am most looking forward to the day that our first Financial Accountability Office starts their work, because only then will we start to rebuild trust in the Legislature, in our democracy and governments for all parties going forward.

PETITIONS

AGGREGATE EXTRACTION

Mr. Steve Clark: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario,

and I want to thank Jim Bertram from the municipality of North Grenville for taking the summer to get I believe about 350 signatures. It's a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas we the residents of South Gower and surrounding communities are aware of an application by Lafarge Canada Inc. for a licence to extract up to a 500,000 tonnes of aggregate annually from the 121.33-acre proposed McGill pit on Bennett Road in the municipality of North Grenville, and at end of operations will leave residents with a 95-acre 'stagnant, exposed body of water'; and

"Whereas the proposed hours of operation will be 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. weekdays and 7 a.m. to 3 p.m. on Saturdays. It is expected the activity will result in one truck every six minutes, this being heavy trucks and trailers, hauling aggregate on roads not fortified for heavy truck traffic and in close proximity to homes; and

"Whereas the risks this operation poses to the quality and quantity of groundwater area residents are reliant on for their wells, in addition to its effect on the natural environment, including air quality, have not been studied sufficiently to satisfy the local community regarding the degree of risk/benefit; and

"Whereas the risks this operation poses on local wetlands, function and viability, because of such operations; and

"Whereas there is no provision under existing provincial legislation for residents to be compensated for any present or future decreases in property values or a reduction in their quality of life stemming from the operation; and

"Whereas many of the issues raised with concern to the proposed McGill pit are similar to those expressed during presentations to the Standing Committee on General Government during its review of the Aggregate Resources Act, which haves yet to be addressed;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to direct the Ministry of Natural Resources to require that all concerns raised by residents are fully addressed before a licence to extract aggregate from the McGill pit is granted; and further, that the Standing Committee on General Government complete its review of the Aggregate Resources Act and present its recommendations to the Legislature without further delay; and that all aggregate applications be suspended until the recommendations are tabled and implemented."

I'll affix my signature and send it to the table with page Katherine.

PUBLIC TRANSIT

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: I have a petition here being read on behalf of the member from Scarborough-Agincourt. It reads as follows:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas Scarborough residents north of Ontario Highway 401 and east of Don Mills are without a rapid transit option; and

"Whereas a strong transit system is critical for increasing economic development and tackling income disparity; and

"Whereas this geographical area continues to grow and the demand for strong rapid transit continues to increase; and

"Whereas Sheppard Avenue is a major artery for automobile traffic for commuters travelling from suburbs to downtown Toronto, and travelling from suburb to suburb; and

"Whereas ground-level rapid transit would increase traffic, restrict lanes for automobiles, and add further risk for pedestrians and commuters at dangerous intersections along Sheppard Avenue; and

"Whereas demands for underground rapid transit along Sheppard Avenue have been part of public discourse for over 50 years; and

"Whereas the province of Ontario previously approved a plan from the city of Toronto to extend the Sheppard subway line from Downsview to Scarborough Centre; and

"Whereas an extension to the Sheppard subway line will require contributions and co-operation from the city of Toronto, the province of Ontario and the government of Canada;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly as follows:

"To support the extension of the Sheppard subway line east to Scarborough Centre; and

"To call upon all levels of government to contribute multi-year funding for the construction and operation of an extension to the Sheppard subway line."

I agree with this, will sign it and send it down to the desk with Erica.

1340

CARELESS DRIVING

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: It is a great pleasure that I'm going to read into the assembly a petition created by Rick Levesque, an activist in my community who would like to see distracted drivers have demerit points awarded for that type of driving.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas any persons convicted of using hand-held devices while operating a motor vehicle should be included in the Ontario Highway Traffic Act category of careless driving. This to include fines of not less than \$200 and not more than \$1,000, as laid out in section 130 of the Highway Traffic Act of Ontario, and six demerit points to be recorded to their driving record;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"Any persons convicted of using hand-held devices while operating a motor vehicle should be included in the Ontario Highway Traffic Act category of careless driving. This to include fines of not less than \$200 and not more than \$1,000, as laid out in section 130 of the

Highway Traffic Act of Ontario, and six demerit points to be recorded to their driving record."

I agree with this petition. I will affix my signature and I'll present it to page Daniel. Thank you very much, Daniel.

PHYSIOTHERAPY SERVICES

Mr. Jim McDonell: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas the Ministry of Health is planning on cutting physiotherapy services to seniors in long-term-care homes—from an estimated \$110 million to \$58.5 million; and

"Whereas with this change seniors will not receive the care they are currently entitled to through their current OHIP physiotherapy providers, who the government plans to delist from OHIP on August 1st, 2013; and

"Whereas the government has announced that the funding level, the number of treatments a resident could receive, has not been specified and will be reduced from a maximum of 150 visits/year to some unknown level, which means the hours of care and number of staff providing seniors with physiotherapy will ... be significantly reduced as of August 1st, 2013; and

"Whereas our current OHIP physiotherapy providers have been providing seniors with individualized treatments for over 48 years, and these services have ... proven to help seniors improve in their activities of daily living, mobility, pain and falls risk;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To review and reverse this drastic cut of ... physiotherapy services to seniors, our most vulnerable population, and to continue with \$110-million physiotherapy funding for seniors in long-term-care homes."

I agree with this and will be passing it off to page William.

ONTARIO RANGER PROGRAM

Mr. Norm Miller: It's my pleasure to present this petition to do with the Ontario Ranger Program. It's "Save the Ontario Ranger Program.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"We, the undersigned residents of Ontario, draw attention to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to the following:

"The Ontario Ranger Program takes youth out of their comfort zones by taking youth from the south and placing them in northern camps and vice versa, allowing for personal growth;

"The Ontario Ranger Program also helps nearby rural communities as the Ontario Rangers help with various projects and build partnerships within the communities; the work is recognized and appreciated by these small communities;

"An extensive amount of work maintaining the interior routes and major provincial parks such as

Quetico, Algonquin and Temagami is completed by Ontario Rangers on multi-day overnight canoe trips (and is otherwise unreachable);

"The lifelong skills and friendships built during the Ontario Ranger Program help youth develop into mature, confident, independent individuals, which is well worth the money spent on the program;

"Low-income and high-risk youth sent to rangers are isolated from their home situation and are exposed to the positive team-building environment within the Ontario Ranger Program;

"Therefore, your petitioners call upon the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to demonstrate that the Ontario Ranger Program is a valuable program to the youth of Ontario, reverse the decision to close the Ontario Ranger Program and continue to help youth make a difference in Ontario."

I support this petition.

TAXATION

Mr. Victor Fedeli: I have a petition here signed by 572 people, 222 of whom dropped off the petition into my office.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the provincial agency Metrolinx recently provided several options to pay for improvements to gridlock and transit in the Toronto and Hamilton areas, including a 1% hike in the HST and a five-cent-a-litre gasoline tax; and

"Whereas internal government documents show nearly 50 other new provincial taxes and fees are being considered, including a monthly phone bill surcharge, increased licence and validation fees for drivers, vehicle owners, fishers, hunters and park users; and

"Whereas taxpayers in northern Ontario are already overburdened with demands by the provincial government on their pocketbooks, and residents in northern Ontario experience higher costs for many items, including transportation;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To not pay for the expansion of Toronto and Hamilton transit through taxes, fares, fees, surcharges or other mechanisms that burden the taxpayers of northern Ontario."

I agree with this petition. I sign my name to it and give it to page Bridget.

LONG-TERM CARE

Mr. Jim McDonell: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas the Auditor General confirmed in his December 2012 report that the Champlain CCAC had the longest wait time in Ontario in which 90% of their clients were placed; and

"Whereas the region requires a comprehensive plan assessing the future long-term-care bed needs of the

region, as well as the provision of community care for independent and semi-independent seniors; and

"Whereas the number of Ontarians over 75 years of age is projected to increase by 30% by 2021, the year the baby boomers start to turn 75 years old, putting even more demand on the number of available LTC beds;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care immediately conduct a study to identify the current and future requirements for long-term-care beds and community care for independent and semi-independent seniors in our region of Stormont, Dundas and Glengarry, including the city of Cornwall;

"That such a study also identify future solutions for the current and future demand and the possible short- and long-term role the Cornwall General Hospital could play in fulfilling these requirements;

"That the Cornwall Community Hospital be funded to retain the Cornwall General Hospital until such a study is conducted and the role of this building is assessed in the solution to the LTC bed crisis."

I will be passing this off to page William.

ONTARIO COLLEGE OF TRADES

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas Ontario's tradespeople are subject to stifling regulation and are compelled to pay membership fees to the unaccountable College of Trades;

"Whereas these fees are a tax grab that drives down the wages of skilled tradespeople;

"Whereas Ontario desperately needs a plan to solve our critical shortage of skilled tradespeople by encouraging our youth to enter the trades and attracting new tradespeople; and

"Whereas the latest policies from the Wynne government only aggravate the looming skilled trades shortage in Ontario;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To immediately disband the College of Trades, cease imposing needless membership fees and enact policies to attract young Ontarians into skilled trade careers."

PHYSIOTHERAPY SERVICES

Mr. Bill Walker: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Ministry of Health is planning major changes to the provision of OHIP physiotherapy services as of August 1st; and

"Whereas this will drastically reduce the number of allowable treatments to 12 per year for people who are currently eligible for 100 treatments annually; and

"Whereas funding for physiotherapy services to seniors in long-term-care homes would be cut by almost

50%, from an estimated \$110 million per year to \$58.5 million per year; and

"Whereas ambulatory seniors in retirement homes would have to travel offsite for physiotherapy; and

"Whereas under the changes scheduled for August 1, the cost of visits under the CCAC (community care access centre) model will rise to \$120 per visit, rather than the current fee of \$12.20 per visit through OHIP physiotherapy providers; and

"Whereas these changes will deprive seniors and other eligible clients from the many health and mobility benefits of physiotherapy;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the delisting of OHIP physiotherapy clinics as of August 1st not proceed and that the provincial government guarantee that there will be no reduction in services currently available for seniors, children and youths, people with disabilities and those who are currently eligible for OHIP-funded physiotherapy."

I support this petition, will sign it and give it to page Erica to take to the Clerks' desk.

1350

WIND TURBINES

Mr. Jim McDonell: A petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas industrial wind turbine developments have raised concerns among citizens over health, safety and property values; and

"Whereas the Green Energy Act allows wind turbine developments to bypass meaningful public input and municipal approval;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Ministry of the Environment revise the Green Energy Act to allow full public input and municipal approvals on all industrial wind farm developments; and

"That the Minister of the Environment conduct a thorough scientific study on the health and environmental impacts of industrial wind turbines."

I agree with this and will be passing it off to page Taylor.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Petitions? That concludes the time that we have today for the reading of petitions.

ROYAL ASSENT

SANCTION ROYALE

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I beg to inform the House that on behalf of Her Majesty the Queen, His Honour the Lieutenant Governor was pleased to assent to certain bills in his office on June 13, 2013.

The Deputy Clerk (Mr. Todd Decker): The following are the titles of the bills to which His Honour did assent:

An Act to implement Budget measures and to enact and amend various Acts / Loi visant à mettre en œuvre les mesures budgétaires et à édicter et à modifier diverses lois.

An Act to revive Terra Paving Inc.

An Act respecting the Beechwood Cemetery Company.

An Act to revive Marsh & Co. Hospitality Realty Inc.

An Act respecting the Royal Conservatory of Music.

An Act to revive Universal Health Consulting Inc.

An Act to amalgamate The Sisters of St. Joseph of Hamilton, The Sisters of St. Joseph of the Diocese of London, in Ontario, The Sisters of St. Joseph of the Diocese of Peterborough in Ontario and Sisters of St. Joseph for the Diocese of Pembroke in Canada.

An Act to revive Aspen Drywall Inc.

An Act to revive Triple "D" Holdings Ltd.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

STRONGER PROTECTION FOR ONTARIO CONSUMERS ACT, 2013

LOI DE 2013 RENFORÇANT LA PROTECTION DU CONSOMMATEUR ONTARIEN

Resuming the debate adjourned on June 11, 2013, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 55, An Act to amend the Collection Agencies Act, the Consumer Protection Act, 2002 and the Real Estate and Business Brokers Act, 2002 and to make consequential amendments to other Acts / Projet de loi 55, Loi modifiant la Loi sur les agences de recouvrement, la Loi de 2002 sur la protection du consommateur et la Loi de 2002 sur le courtage commercial et immobilier et apportant des modifications corrélatives à d'autres lois.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): When this House last debated second reading of Bill 55, the member for Burlington had the floor, and I'm pleased to recognize again the member for Burlington.

Mrs. Jane McKenna: It is my pleasure to be back in the Legislature and rejoin the debate on Bill 55, Speaker. Bill 55 was designed with the goal of providing greater protection of the people of this province—boosting consumer confidence and making Ontario's marketplace more clear and fair.

Government oversight is important to making sure that consumer dealings stay above board, but enforcement is everything. Government sets the tone, and legislation means nothing if it isn't acted on.

Six years ago, the Liberal government designed a piece of archival legislation intended to strengthen transparency and accountability. It was part of a consumer protection omnibus that, like Bill 55, also addressed

issues such as real estate fraud. But even while it was trumpeting its commitment to transparency, accountability, disclosure and straight-dealing, the Liberal government was failing to honour that commitment. The Liberal government was working under the assumption that someone else was taking care of transparency; someone else was stepping up and being accountable.

The Archives and Recordkeeping Act was bundled into another consumer protection bill, Bill 152, the Ministry of Government Services Consumer Protection and Service Modernization Act. In June, we learned that senior Liberal government officials condoned the deletion of emails and entire email accounts in contravention of the spirit and the letter of legislation they themselves created. We learned that for the first six years of the government's Archives and Recordkeeping Act, the Premier's office acted as if the legislation did not exist. It operated without any approved records retention schedules, raising the question of whether there were any other deletions that went undetected during that period.

I have the highest regard for the Minister of Consumer Services, someone I have had the privilege of working with closely on many occasions since being elected. She cares a great deal about her portfolio, both personally and professionally. But the problem that this government faces, it seems to me, is that it can no longer command respect on some pretty fundamental issues. Trust has been deeply damaged, and the people are understandably outraged.

As the email archive scandal demonstrates, we need to build in checks and balances, real powers of oversight and real penalties, because otherwise we're building legislation that can easily be ignored—and, as we see, it is. I'm happy to support Bill 55, but also eager to send it along to committee, where we can make the minister's good ideas even better.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: It's good to be back here in the House, with some new members here. I'm very pleased to welcome the two new members that we have in our caucus now: from London West, Peggy Sattler, and from Windsor-Tecumseh, Percy Hatfield. I'm very proud of those accomplishments, and very happy that they are here to join us today.

But I'm also here to talk today, of course, about Bill G55, the Stronger Protection for Ontario Consumers Act. One of the things that I like about Bill 55, under schedule 1 of this act, is under the collection agencies agreement. The collection agencies agreement's function—you have debt settlement services that offer services to consumers who unfortunately find themselves in a situation because of actions that happened in their lives financially and who are in dire need. They seek out the services of the debt settlement services, and they're vulnerable. They probably know they have made mistakes, and they are looking to get their life back on track, but what will happen is that some of these companies take advantage of them. They charge them, sometimes, a very exorbitant

amount of fees up front in order to assist them, because what the debt settlement service is going to do is talk to the creditors—the companies that they owe—in order to kind of negotiate something maybe more manageable, so that these people can get their life back on track. Just because you make a mistake financially in your life doesn't mean your whole life's over, you can't start over and you can't start fresh, take responsibility for those things and pay them back but move on.

So it's good to see that that is in there, but we do have to be very careful that we're protecting the consumer when we look at this act, and we have to make sure that the contracts that these consumers sign are in plain English, so they understand what they're signing. As well, there's a 10-day window in this bill that allows consumers to cancel that contract.

I'd like to talk a little bit more about it, Speaker, but I'm running out of time. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: A pleasure to join the debate today on Bill 55. It's had a lot of debate; I think we're over 16 hours now, and I believe at this point there are at least two parties in the House that would like to see this move on to committee.

What this does, in a very practical sense—we have all sorts of interests in this House; often it's broad public policy, and often it's quite practical things. This bill proposes to protect consumers from door-to-door salesmen—I think we've all had complaints from constituents about water heater rental companies and other door-to-door salespeople that haven't acted in the best interests of Ontario's consumers. We've got some debt settlement services, and we've also got some interest in some changes to the real estate consumer protection field.

I think it's time that we move this on. I think all parties have had their say on it. It is time that it go before the committee. I'd urge all members to get on with the vote and to move this bill forward. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. John O'Toole: I'm very pleased to first recognize the member from Burlington and her insightful remarks and how appropriate they were, but I'd like to just take a moment to digress and welcome to the Legislature the five new members: Doug Holyday, as well as Percy Hatfield, Peggy Sattler, Mitzie Hunter and John Fraser. It will be an enjoyable time as long as you participate; if you don't participate, you're spoiling a real opportunity.

But this is a really good example to get up and hold the government's feet to the fire. Here's the deal: We're talking today about a bill introduced by the Minister of Finance, Mr. Sousa, on the Financial Accountability Office. This is another glaring example of too little, too late. They've spent all the money. We're basically bankrupt, and they're now saying that they are going to be accountable. This is going to be another level of bureaucracy so that you won't be able to blame the

Premier or the Minister of Finance. They're going to say, "Well, the accountability officer should have found this."

1400

Bill 55 is really about consumer protection. In the broadest sense, I think we're all here to protect the consumers of Ontario who pay the bills. The taxpayers of Ontario have been fleeced. In fact, right now, they have increased spending, it's my understanding, somewhere in the order of 60% to 70%. You have to ask yourself: Are we any better off? We have the highest energy prices in North America. We have a scandal in much of health care, along with the Ornge helicopters and eHealth, and ongoing commitments where the consumers of Ontario are being abused, frankly.

Bill 55, in itself, has been debated before. I have spoken on the bill. It's a bill we initially support. We are concerned about some of the disclosure requirements under the real estate brokers act, but I'll say more about that a little later.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: I also would like to add my voice to the debate, with particular reference to the debt settlement services. I think it's important to clarify that when we are looking at protecting consumers, our goal should be exactly that: to protect consumers. Now, debt settlement services are actually services that are consumer-based. They're protecting the consumer or assisting the consumer in paying back their debts.

Regulating them makes sense, but let's keep in mind that the agencies that most people complain about are not the debt settlement services; it's actually the collection agents and some of the tactics they use, the aggressive manner in which they communicate with folks who are facing debts. That's an area that definitely needs some attention. I think I'd like to see more balance in the bill so that we're not just looking at debt settlement services, which are ostensibly protecting the consumer in a way, but we also balance that by looking at collection agencies and credit counsellors, who are actually not-for-profit but are funded almost entirely by the banks. Let's look at those as well to ensure that they're providing balanced and fair services for consumers, and they're not exploiting consumers or using inappropriate techniques.

With the door-to-door sales, yes, many of my constituents have complained about that, but the bill is narrow in the sense that it only covers the gas-operated heaters. There are other services—energy in general—that are provided door-to-door that should be covered and would provide greater consumer protection.

Certainly, there's protection here that's afforded to consumers, and we support that. There are some areas where we can expand the bill, and I'm looking forward to this bill moving on to the committee stage so we can address some of those issues and work on expanding it so that it provides greater protection.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That concludes our time for questions and comments. We return now to the member for Burlington for her reply.

Mrs. Jane McKenna: I'd like to say thank you for the kind words to the member from Durham. It's always nice that he has something always positive to say.

Consumers in this day and age face a dizzying array of options and outcomes, both positive and negative. It is important that the province is there for them, Speaker. It is critically important that we are mindful of the need for strong protections and that we match that with education and awareness measures that give people the critical tools that will improve their ability to identify potential problems before they become a full-blown crisis.

It is essential, when it comes to legislation of this kind, that it does exactly what it promises to do and that it does so clearly and strongly. Unfortunately, we have seen far too many government bills in the last session and the current one that are just window dressing, legislation that functions first and foremost as a branding tool rather than legislative or regulatory tool.

With Bill 55, the government wants to appear to tackle certain areas of consumer services involving high-pressure sales tactics that generate complaints—a bigger cooling-off period for water heaters, for example, or firmer rules for debt settlers. But when it comes to a bill that explicitly intends to strip away the mask of deceptive and unfair practices, when it comes to a bill that hopes to foster a safe and trusting business environment, this government is obligated, Speaker, to step up its game.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: Here we are back on the first day of the Legislature. This government just does not take this place seriously. Not only is there not a quorum here, Mr. Speaker; there is one member on the government benches. It's absolutely disgusting. I'd like to call a quorum.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Is there a quorum present in the House?

The Deputy Clerk (Mr. Todd Decker): A quorum is not present.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Call in the members.

The Acting Speaker ordered the bells rung.

The Deputy Clerk (Mr. Todd Decker): A quorum is now present, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I return to the member for Halton, who has the floor.

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: It's not up to the opposition to keep a quorum. And I say to the member for Oakville, in your new positions as whip, you should take that position a hell of a lot more seriously than you're doing today. It's disgusting that there's merely five members of the government here. You should be ashamed of yourself.

Interjection.

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: You should be ashamed of yourself. That's what you should be.

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I'd ask the member for Oakville to refrain from heckling the member for Halton. The member for Halton has the floor.

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: On a more positive note, I'd like to congratulate the five new members in the House and welcome them to these hallowed halls. I'm sure your time here will be well spent. It will be an exciting time in your life. Beginning a new career is always exciting. It's a steep learning curve, and as we go through steep learning curves in this life, I think it's an interesting time; it's always exciting.

As you start on your first day, the government usually isn't this absent; they usually have a few members in the House to listen to the speeches. But today, they seem to be very busy and otherwise occupied, I'm sure, doing something very important. Did you get the sarcasm to that? That was a very sarcastic remark.

However, we congratulate those five new members who joined us today. You'll pardon me if I give a special congratulations to Doug Holyday, a man who has served on many different levels of government—municipal, Metro and now provincial politics—devoted a lifetime to public service, something that isn't always possible for everyone to do. Those who do have the opportunity to do it, such as Doug Holyday, deserve our congratulations.

We are here today to discuss Bill 55, the consumers' protection act. I have to ask myself about Bill 55—here we are the first day back. Ontario has a huge debt, we have a huge deficit and we have a huge lack of jobs in this province. And I ask myself: Will Bill 55, the consumer protection act, reduce the debt of Ontario?

Our debt is currently \$270 billion or so. That figure has doubled in the last nine years of this government's tenure. It took 146 years for us to get to \$135 billion, and this government has doubled it in less than 10 years. Will Bill 55 reduce that debt or move Ontario closer to debt reduction? I've got to say no. In fact, this bill will have absolutely no effect on the reduction of debt.

Will Bill 55 help balance that budget, the budget which is almost \$12 billion in deficit? Will Bill 55 help reduce that debt? I've got to say, after careful consideration, no, it will not. It won't do a thing to help balance that budget or reduce our deficit.

Will Bill 55 help create jobs in Ontario? We could use a million new jobs in Ontario, such as were created by our government in the late 1990s. Will this bill help lay the foundations for the private sector to begin to build on those jobs? Again, I'm afraid, the answer is no.

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This government has before it bills such as the tanning beds act—an important piece of legislation, I'm sure. Is it going to do anything for our fiscal position? Is it going to reduce our debt? Is it going to balance our budget? Is the tanning beds act going to create jobs in Ontario? No, it won't.

We're dealing with the condo board act and dispute settlement problems with condo boards. It's not going to do a thing to help reduce our debt, balance our budget or create jobs. Those three things are what Ontarians are crying out for, and yet none of the legislation before this House deals with any of those important issues.

Today, the Minister of Finance introduced the Financial Accountability Officer Act. As the member from

Durham mentioned, this is a classic bill locking the barn door after the horse is gone. The horse left a long time ago. It has already had several foals; the first one is at the racetrack already. It was a long time ago when the fiscal responsibilities of this government went sadly lacking.

I don't see the Financial Accountability Officer Act reducing our debt. I don't see it helping to balance our budget. I don't see it creating any jobs, other than the job of the commissioner. What I do see it doing is providing a scapegoat for the Minister of Finance, who is supposed to be on top of all the costs of this government. He's supposed to know what's going on, and yet here, with the Financial Accountability Officer Act, he's going to hire someone to tell him what's going on. Is something wrong with that?

The Premier should know what's going on, and yet this bill is going to provide a scapegoat for the government whenever they get into fiscal problems. I think that's wrong. But like Bill 55, it won't reduce our debt, it won't balance our budget and it won't create jobs, other than for the commissioner who is being appointed.

Bill 55 has three main points in it, and when I say they won't affect our fiscal situation in Ontario—one of them deals with debt settlement services. Basically, that deals with companies—there are about 100 companies in Ontario that are involved in this area. Money Mart is perhaps the largest of the 100. Money Mart could have done a good job financing the Oakville power plant or the Mississauga power plant. You were paying 14% interest on that debt. Money Mart probably would have been able to do that cheaper for you. These are people who prey on citizens of Ontario who are in a very vulnerable stage of their lives.

It also is going to impact door-to-door salespeople who deal with water heaters. That has to be one of the primary situations in Ontario that's crying out for this government to spend 16-odd hours or so debating how it has to be corrected: door-to-door water heater salesmen. "But we're going to control them with this bill. This bill will put an end to people who take advantage of our seniors when they are selling them a water heater door-to-door"—something that certainly isn't going to change the situation of our debt, our deficit or our jobs.

The third thing this bill does is deal with the real estate business. In the real estate business, there's something called a phantom offer. I don't think any legitimate real estate agent with a scrap of integrity would ever use this as a process to sell a house, but it's when you say, "Oh, I have another offer coming in, and it's worth this much"—probably about the same as you're offering—"but I can get your offer in first, and therefore you'll get this house if you act quickly." It's a phantom offer; the other offer doesn't exist. There's no documentation for it, but it does put undue pressure on a purchaser. Again, I say that it's not something that most real estate agents would be caught dead doing. However, this bill attacks that process.

This bill is going to do nothing for our deficit, balancing our budget, or to create jobs in Ontario, so I

say to the government, you're not here today; I wonder where you are. I hope you're developing some legislation that is going to help Ontario.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to take this opportunity, if I might, to introduce my brother Tom, his wife, Carol, and my wife, Sandy. Most people think of me as the apple guy in this House. Well, this is the real apple guy. A lot of people know about the apple blossoms and apple pies; my sister-in-law is the real apple blossom, and, of course, Sandy—

Mr. Rick Bartolucci: But the apple of your eye is your wife.

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: Sandy is the apple of my eye.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Thank you very much. We are pleased to welcome the Chudleigh family to the Legislature today.

Questions and comments?

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: A pleasure to be back. Welcome, everyone.

I listened to the member from Halton, and, actually, our take in the New Democratic Party to this government bill is a little bit different. Yes, we agree it does not go far enough. The place to address that, however, is committee. The bill makes small strides in the right direction, I think. We need to strengthen it, so let's get to it. Let's do that strengthening. Let's talk about it and let's debate it in committee and get it done.

I don't think obfuscating and stalling the process is what taxpayers and our constituents have sent us here for. I know my constituents have sent me here to get something done, very, very clearly, and that was the tack that we took last year when we negotiated around the budget. That's why we got our demands in the budget. Unfortunately, my friends to the right here, figuratively and literally, did not take that tack, so they got nothing out of the budget.

Again, our constituents sent us here to get something done—not just to talk, not to obfuscate, not to stall, but to get something done, and that's what we're committed to doing. In fact, we'd like to push things along a little faster, too, as I'm sure my colleagues in the Progressive Conservatives would as well. Certainly, a Financial Accountability Office, we hope, will do that; that's why we got that in the budget.

This is important. We need to move it forward. Of course, where consumers are concerned, boy, a little step is better than nothing, but this is a little step. I use the example of someone in my constituency who said she tried to go bankrupt and she couldn't afford to. She contacted a debt settlement service and they quoted her a figure to go bankrupt. She said, "The reason I need to go bankrupt is that I can't come up with that figure." Now, how absurd is that? That's Orwellian.

So obviously more has to be done. We have to do it. My constituency has demanded that we do, so let's get the bill to committee, let's work on it and let's make it stronger. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Hon. Michael Gravelle: Thanks so much, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed great to be back. Welcome to everyone. I'm particularly happy to be here. Thank you to all the members who were so supportive during my recent health struggles. You've all been great, and I feel terrific. I'm back to being myself, as they say—stronger than ever and more dangerous, I hope, than ever as well, but—

Interjections.

Hon. Michael Gravelle: Well, in a good sense. You know what I mean by that. Thank you very much. It's great to be here.

May I say that I think I agree with the member from Parkdale—High Park and many of our colleagues: We're here to get some work done, to make some things happen for our constituents. Indeed, Bill 55, the Stronger Protection for Ontario Consumers Act, is a good example of that. I think, indeed, it is important that we move this forward.

There's no question, when you think about issues such as door-to-door sales—like every one of my colleagues here in the Legislature, we get a substantial number of complaints and calls from people who have issues with door-to-door sales. I think we need to tighten that up, make it protect our consumers in a more significant way. It's awfully important to do that.

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The member for Parkdale—High Park made a reference to debt settlement services. Those are the kinds of issues where we need to make some improvements.

Certainly, I want to encourage all my colleagues to do the same thing. This is about us finding an opportunity to work together on issues that mean a great deal to our constituents. There's no question that stronger protection for the citizens that we represent is really, really important. I would certainly encourage all members of the House to move forward in a positive way.

We really can make a difference here; we need to work together to do that. Certainly, Premier Wynne has made it clear she is here to govern and to bring forward legislation that's of benefit to everyone in the province.

We were very grateful to have her up in northern Ontario last week. She spent four days up there opening up a law school, a new law school, the first ever in northern Ontario, which is fantastic—the school of architecture in Sudbury, I say to my colleague from Sudbury. And of course she made the great decision regarding the Experimental Lakes Area, the fact that we're going to be funding this operation for years to come.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments.

Mr. John O'Toole: Again, I respect the member from Halton because he was trying to make some very important points, I think, on the three particular schedules in the bill. At that time, as you recall, he called quorum because the new whip was unable to keep any of his own caucus—

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: Where were you, John?

Mr. John O'Toole: We were watching it on television and having a meeting. There was a caucus meeting, as it turned out. The member from Halton, with the experience he brings to the House here as kind of an expert on finance issues—I'm only going to deal with one of the schedules here.

He talked about the Collection Agencies Act. That's one where I think we have agreement, because most often, these people who are availing themselves of these agencies to borrow money, money market or whatever they're called, sometimes they're the most vulnerable in society. They're often so needy because of their poor circumstances. It could be drug abuse; it could be a lot of different things that cause it. They're called on to pay an inordinate amount of interest. Once it goes into collection, you basically have lost any rights. The Collection Agencies Act, I believe, is something that we can agree on.

I question, quite honestly, why the government is floundering. Why don't they get this bill into committee? They can't manage even the simplest of bills that we kind of agreed to that would look at the—Mr. Chudleigh mentioned the real estate brokers act.

One little condition in it is that this is going to allow—and I know we all know a number of real estate people; they're very hard-working, self-motivated people. If you don't work, you don't get commission. I know potentially Sandy at one time was in the business. Here's what it says: They may be able to set a price, which would be a fixed price, plus commission. I would suspect they should be able to negotiate the whole package of how they're going to remunerate it. If you are selling a \$1-million or \$500,000 home at 5% or 6%, it makes you wonder how much you're going to have to pay for that business.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: Speaker, I understand that members opposite really want to push things forward and move things forward and get to the business of what people sent us here for, and that's to make things better for them, to get results for them.

One thing that the member from Parkdale-High Park said was that you have your opportunity to do that. We had the opportunity to negotiate and present our ideas in the budget process. Unfortunately, the members opposite decided to step back out of that process. They didn't contribute to that.

So today we are talking about Bill 55, and we have to bring our voices to Bill 55. I agree with the bill. We should be looking at having much better consumer protection.

My constituents of London-Fanshawe call all the time about all kinds of contracts that they enter into or agreements that they have or even services with cell-phone companies and how they're being—they don't understand how they can't get out of a contract, how it's costing them more than they actually thought it was going to cost them. A lot of these services are done as

well on the phone, and they can't go in to someone and speak face-to-face and explain their concerns.

So one of the things that we thought would be a good idea in this bill is also having a strong consumer advocate who represents consumers so that they can have a voice in that advocate. They've oftentimes gotten into the situation because they don't understand or because somebody, a really slick salesperson, came to the door and sold them something they didn't really want. Having the consumer advocate gives them somebody who's actually going to be on their side, to listen to their concerns and try to help them navigate through the problem that they've entered into a contract that they shouldn't have.

Speaker, I agree that we should be looking at this bill and sending it to committee and working out the details as to how to make this bill better.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That concludes our time for questions and comments. I'm pleased to return to the member for Halton for his response.

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: I say to the member for Parkdale-High Park: We're debating this bill. She wants to move it forward. If there was another bill awaiting debate that would affect the debt in Ontario or affect the job structure in Ontario or affect the budget or the deficit, we'd be more than happy to move on to that bill. There just doesn't seem to be anything this government has. The government is out of ideas. It has no direction that it's giving to Ontario.

I say to the Minister of Northern Development and Mines, with all sincerity, welcome back to the House. It's nice to see the member in the House again with a full head of hair and in good, robust health. He was sorely missed when he was gone. Mr. Gravelle is certainly a person whom all members of this House can approach with their issues, and we're pleased to have him back in the House in good health.

The member for Durham, again, spoke to the bill and made some very nice remarks, and I appreciate that and thank him very much.

The member for London-Fanshawe, in somewhat typical NDP fashion, is going to add to the bureaucracy of the province. She's going to have a consumer advocacy person appointed. Of course, that person would have a huge number of people working for them. It would add considerably to our cost of doing business in Ontario, it would add considerably to the budget, which is in deficit now, and it would add to our debt, which is at \$270 billion.

But none of that really matters to the NDP. They're the ones who propped up this government. They're the ones who allowed this government to create all the issues and problems that they have in the last six months.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: I'm pleased today to be able to rise and speak to Bill 55, An Act to amend the Collection Agencies Act, the Consumer Protection Act, 2002 and the Real Estate and Business Brokers Act, 2002 and to make consequential amendments to other Acts.

I think there's no question, when it comes to consumer protection, that we need the teeth in the particular bill. However, Mr. Speaker, I want to point out to you that it's one thing to create the legislation. It's one thing to debate it and pass it and go through all the hearings etc. It's another thing to enforce it.

I look forward to some examples being set. I can tell you an example that happened this summer. My wife is a council member in the township of Severn for ward 2, in the village of Coldwater. A lady called our house on a Saturday afternoon. A gentleman had come to the door. This lady lives alone. Actually, she lives at the end of a sort of dead-end street. What happened was that this gentleman came to the door saying he was there on behalf of the municipality to install a filter on her water system; it was now the law to have this particular filter put on.

In complete innocence—so many of our seniors, in fact, are very innocent in this way—she believed the gentleman. She let him into her home. He went down into the basement and he said, "Yeah, the filter will have to go on here, in this particular location." Following that, he said, "I'll be back in a few days to hook it up"—to hook up this particular filter. It's law and it would be all free. A few minutes later, her daughter comes into the house. She'd come home to visit her mom for a few days. She said, "Oh, I just had a guy in who's going to put a free filter in for me." What had happened was that this gentleman never did come back. So the daughter and the mother called my wife and said, "What do we do in this particular case?" I don't know what you'd do on a Saturday afternoon with legislation. I know we may have the legislation, but I don't really know what we would actually do in this particular case.

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I have some friends in the OPP. I called the OPP communications department and asked how you would actually handle this. He said, "I think the first thing you should do is go to the radio station and actually put the story on the radio to watch out," because what this gentleman had done, the guy who had come to the door, was he had actually cased the whole house. He'd looked at the whole house. He was able to see everything she had, and at some time he can come back and do a break-and-enter on the house. We think that's really what he was up to. So, by calling the OPP ourselves and then calling the local radio stations, we were able to at least get it out in front of the public. It was all over the radio station, and I think the guy sort of disappeared after that particular case.

But I'm wondering: In a case like that, how does a bill like this actually protect the consumer? I see nothing in it that would say—government offices are all closed on weekends, other than the police. I just don't know how—we continue to debate these types of bills and talk about them. It's always a good idea, but when there's actually a pressure to take steps to improve it, then I'm not so sure the bill actually works. So, based on that, we have some problems in that particular area.

There's no question about it. The examples of the water heater—the water heater situation comes up all the time, and just door-to-door salesmen who are doing things that are fairly illegal. But in a lot of cases it's interesting that we have to even bring in all kinds of legislation like this. The problem I'm finding is that I think we're growing and growing in all kinds of legislation we've passed in this House, and I don't know how much of it is actually being enforced. I think of things like the Ministry of Natural Resources. The Ministry of Natural Resources, which was once one of the most proud ministries we had in this province, has been gutted so badly. The conservation officers have beautiful four-wheel drive trucks to drive around in, but there's no gas to put in the trucks. They can't afford the gas in their budgets, so the trucks sit idly by, and you can hear that conversation from any conservation officer. They'll tell you how that particular ministry has been gutted. The same thing applies to a lot of our rules around highway traffic safety and around the laws that our police are to protect—they simply do not have the amount of money in their budgets to actually handle the complete enforcement.

Then you have these new bodies. My favourite enforcement type of thing will be the College of Trades. We've got this brand new bureaucracy downtown. Apparently they're out hiring enforcement officers as we speak to go out and check on people in the trades. I'm not so sure what happens after 4 o'clock on Friday when all these guys are out moonlighting and working out of the back of a car on a Friday night, Saturday and Sunday. I don't expect that the enforcement officers from the College of Trades are going to be out trying to nail them at that time or trying to weed out these people. It's so easy to say that we're going to have new laws, new regulations and new empires, but you know what? Things happen after hours. It's okay if you break the law during the working period and someone's there to actually fine you if you're doing something wrong, whatever it may be, but after that I think you've got some real problems enforcing all these types of things in the evenings and weekends etc.

That's one of the problems I see with this bill.

It's a fancy little bill; it's generated a lot of debate. I look forward to the committee hearings as well. I think it's going to be important to get it to committee, and we'll see what kind of concerns we have.

I think what people really need in this province right now—more than this type of legislation, and I praise the minister for bringing it in—is a government that's going after job creation and getting young people working. Not 24% or 20% youth unemployment, but getting jobs for all those sorts of people, creating a business environment where people want to invest in their businesses, where they want to create jobs, where they want to create wealth that will pay down this debt.

I believe the debt right now, if I'm not mistaken, is about \$1.9 million to \$2.1 million per hour. That's very, very high. When I tell people that, most people don't

understand that you've doubled the accumulated debt, but boy, I'll tell you, they understand \$1.9 million an hour. Most people work their whole life to get a third of the net worth of \$1.9 million an hour, and they simply can't do it.

Obviously, we'll support the bill, but in the end, is this the kind of bill that really needs this kind of debate in this Legislature or should we be doing more around trying to create a better business environment so that we don't have to be a have-not province anymore here in Ontario? I think that's what's very, very important at this stage.

I know everybody today has been congratulating all the new members. I think it's great when people can be brought into the Legislature. It is a very proud day in your life, I'm sure. I'm honoured to be sitting beside MPP Holyday, and I just want to say on behalf of myself, I look forward to working with all five of the new members in the Legislature. I worked a little bit on one of the campaigns, and it was an interesting time to go through that. I think those campaigns, they're kind of the time in your life—it's always bad to be in a campaign because you're always scared and it's kind of a gut-wrenching experience, but at the same time, I think it's why we're here. We love to do those campaigns, in the end. It makes it worthwhile, especially when you've actually won an election, and you can come down here and voice your concerns and get all your press releases out and get your statements in the local media. It's a proud day for anybody who's elected into this Legislature. I just want to say, to all five of the new members, congratulations.

God only knows when we're going to be having another election, though. We don't understand that. We might be at the polls in five or six weeks again, so don't put your signs too far away, because that could easily happen.

Anyway, thank you very much for the chance to speak to Bill 55.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Mr. Speaker, I actually didn't take the opportunity yet, and I'd like to take the opportunity now if you will indulge me, to congratulate all the new members as well. I'd like to congratulate Doug Holyday, Mitzie Hunter, John Fraser, and a special and heartfelt—not that it's not heartfelt for anyone else—but a particularly special congratulations to the new member from Windsor-Tecumseh, Percy Hatfield, who's in the House with me today, and Peggy Sattler, our member from London West. It is truly a remarkable feat, if you think about it. There's only 107 members in this great province, so it's quite an achievement. Congratulations again to all the newly elected members, their family, their friends, and all the hard work that was put in in all their campaigns.

On this bill, the member from Simcoe North made a good point: We start wondering why we're still debating this bill. It's a good point because I think that we could engage in debates on other topics that might be more

fruitful. At this point, I think we all agree, and I don't think there's anything further really to add. We've already discussed some of the shortcomings of the bill that we can address, perhaps, in a better forum, which would be at committee. At this point, there really isn't much more that we can add.

I think that consumer services is clearly an area where we need to protect the consumer to look at the roles that are played in society that we've determined that, given the nature of a consumer not having all the skills, the tools and the knowledge of what's going on in the industry, they need some assistance to make sure they make the best decisions and they are protected. That's why we have a ministry that's involved with ostensibly doing that. So I think we should move this bill along and look at strengthening it in committee. I'd like to also endorse a comment made by my colleague from London-Fanshawe that a consumer ombudsman might be something we should take a look at as well, as a way of ensuring greater protection for consumers in this province; again, a novel idea proposed by the NDP.

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The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: I think the vast majority of speakers I've heard so far are treating this bill with the seriousness it deserves. I think what they're saying is that we've had 17½ hours of debate. Some members are treating it properly, I think, and are providing that input. Others seem to want this to go on indeterminately, and some are playing hide-and-seek. What the vast majority of members are saying, though, is that we've had enough debate; it's time to pass this bill, send it on to committee, have further debate at committee and further input—perhaps improve it along the way—bring it back and improve it in the best interests of Ontario's citizens.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Bill Walker: It's a pleasure to rise, and I too would like to add my congratulations to the five members who have joined this House. It's certainly a privilege for all of us to serve our constituents here, and I trust they'll do it to the best of their ability, as we try to every day on behalf of our respective constituents.

At the end of the day, as my colleague from Simcoe North said, I'm generally in support of this bill, and we can make some moves forward with this. But it baffles me why, for a bill like this, we're spending 17½ hours when we have 600,000 people out of work, we've got the biggest deficit in our province's history and we have a health care system that's not meeting needs. Certainly, in my riding of Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound, we have the Markdale Hospital that, 10 years ago, was promised to be built and still hasn't had any money committed to build it. It's falling around them, and we're talking for 17½ hours.

This should have been sent to committee long ago. Out in the public, we as the opposition are continually being criticized for obstructing and not allowing things to

move through this House. These types of bills could go to committee, they could be researched, they could be debated behind closed doors, with the appropriate people there and the appropriate input, and be done.

The other point that I think my colleague from Simcoe North raised is, who's going to enforce this? It's great, but it's not great to set up more legislation that is never going to be enforced. The public gets brainwashed into thinking this is a wonderful thing for the consumer and everything is going to be rosy tomorrow, and yet there's no one out there.

He actually brought up, again, a very valid point in regard to the skilled trades: We're going to add another 110 or 120 inspectors to virtually put people out of business. I have a guy in my riding who has moved to Alberta because he had to work and he couldn't find work in this great province. And they're even threatening to take his licence out there because he won't pay this fee. He had already paid it ahead of time for three years, and they still want to charge him again, plus the tax.

It's just one of those ones, again, that they really haven't thought through. It's unfortunate that many of the bills are like that. It sounds good to the average taxpayer, if you don't read the details, like the Green Energy Act: clean, green and free. We all know that those three words aren't even close to that bill, Speaker, and we just need to ensure that at the end of the day this type of thing does get addressed in a timely manner so we can move on to the more important work of this Legislature.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: I guess I need to start with the member from Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound. Absolutely, we want to see this move on to committee, and there's a very simple way of doing that: Stop the debate. The only people who are continuing to debate are the Progressive Conservatives. That's what we're saying.

We in the New Democratic Party are saying we want to get things done. The place to actually amend and look at strengthening this bill is in committee. The PCs are holding it up. The question is, why? Why are the PCs holding it up? I'm going to send that out there.

Of course, I have to now add my congratulations, as I did personally, to the new members who have been elected.

I want to correct something, too, that the member from Halton said. Actually, the New Democratic Party in Canada has the best record of balancing budgets of any of the political parties. I think Tommy Douglas ran 17 balanced budgets. The only exception to that: Bob Rae. I won't go into where Bob is now, but we wish him a good retirement. The only exception to the good track record of the New Democratic Party in balancing budgets was his government.

Moving forward on this bill, yes, we want to move forward on this bill, we want to see it get to committee, we want to see it strengthened. Goodness knows, I remember tabling a bill myself on payday lending and payday lenders like Money Mart, etc., it was mentioned

here earlier, who charge—let me correct mistaken impressions of payday lenders—about 544% interest. That's what they really charge, annualized. People think they charge \$21 for every \$100. Annualized, it's 544%, not 21%, just to correct that. We should be looking at issues like that.

Maybe, again, in a discussion at committee around this bill, we can start to look at issues like that, because certainly Quebec does not have them. Certainly we need to move forward to protect consumers from them, among others. So, yes, let's get it to committee. Yes, let's not obstruct it any more by debate. We've had enough. Let's get on with it.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Thank you. We return to the member for Simcoe North for his reply to those questions and comments.

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to thank the member from Bramalea-Gore-Malton, the member from Oakville, the member from Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound and the member from Parkdale-High Park for their comments.

I want to go back to the comments of the member from Parkdale-High Park for a minute. We're so thrilled to be back here. It's such a problem in our caucus, because everybody wants to speak to every bill, and it's a problem because the whip has a hard time getting everyone here. You know what? Some of you other caucuses may not want to speak to this legislation, but we do. It's a fight every meeting to make sure that everybody gets to speak to legislation every minute they can possibly speak to it. Even though it might seem a little boring at times or repetitive, we all want to be getting into Hansard and talking about the importance of this particular piece of legislation.

Kidding aside, though, Bill 55 obviously is a decent bill. I'm back, though, to waiting for it to get to committee. When it does get to committee, I'd like to hear the comments. I think, Mr. Speaker, some of the comments I'm most concerned about are around enforcement. They really are. I can't say that enough, in that when we create this legislation and create these new laws, there's always so much opportunity for people outside of that to continue to break the law. How do you enforce everything that's in a piece of legislation like that, or even in the regulations that they come up with to follow through on the legislation? It becomes a big problem, and I hear it continually with so many of the bills that are passed through this House: You find later that it doesn't have the teeth you thought it might have had, that you might have wanted it to have when it was originally introduced.

I appreciate the time today, Mr. Speaker. Thank you so much for this opportunity, and I look forward to further debate and making sure that all of our members get their voices of concern in there. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Thank you very much. Further debate?

Mr. Jim Wilson: I'm pleased to have the opportunity to join the debate today on Bill 55, the Stronger

Protection for Ontario Consumers Act. This bill amends three acts: the Consumer Protection Act, the Collection Agencies Act and the Real Estate and Business Brokers Act. It addresses consumers' concerns in three areas: debt settlement, the sale of water heaters, and regulations for real estate brokers.

I'm a big believer in consumer protection, not just for my constituents but all Ontarians, so I do welcome this bill, and any bill, for that matter, that aims to achieve this goal. It's certainly hard to be critical of such a cause, but this bill isn't perfect. While I do support it in theory, I look forward to getting it to committee, where amendments can be made.

It's the government's duty to protect consumers, to create clear, concise and easily accessible rules so we can all understand our rights and ensure that those we are doing business with are providing fair and beneficial services. At the same time, we also have to ensure that businesses are given the same courtesy so they can best create the environment that is most conducive to their consumers. They need certainty in the laws so they know what to expect and are able to plan for the future. This government is often quick to introduce regulations or make changes without looking at the big picture, so it's good to have clear, concise laws that can't be changed on a whim.

One obvious question I have for the government concerning this legislation is, why only these three issues: debt settlement, real estate brokers and the sale of water heaters? They are all fair subjects, and it's certainly a healthy process for any society to revisit laws and regulations as industries evolve and change, but there are many areas in the province that would benefit from updated consumer protection. Why the minister just chose these areas is a complete mystery to me, as I'm sure it is to my colleagues and Ontarians across the province who have their own nightmare stories of things they've had to deal with and perhaps may not have had to deal with had there been better consumer protection.

The bill certainly would be more effective if it had addressed consumer protection in more areas or in a more thorough way, but it's neither here nor there. I do appreciate the interest in addressing these issues, and I'd be pleased to briefly touch on them today.

I must say that I think the opposition has done a good job of thoroughly examining this legislation and that we do offer a number of excellent recommendations that I hope the government will consider.

1450

As I mentioned, the first schedule of the bill amends the Collection Agencies Act to regulate debt settlement services that a collection agency or other collector provides. Mr. Speaker, as an aside, I find it incredibly rich to be getting any kind of debt advice from the Liberal government. As we all know, they're responsible for creating our debt crisis and doubling Ontario's debt over the last 10 years, not to mention the huge amounts of waste with the gas plant scandals, eHealth, Ornge, and the list goes on and on. I think consumers across the

board would be better off if the government would focus on cleaning up its act and reducing its deficit before it does anything else.

Nonetheless, protecting consumers is important, so back to debt settlement. If we look at the current framework in Ontario, it's clear that consumers are not protected thoroughly. These services are intensely advertised and marketed to people who are vulnerable, and in a way they can be misleading, often making empty promises and keeping the consumer in a vicious cycle of debt. Ontarians who resort to these services are usually under intense pressure to find a resolution.

One local case that comes to mind is a constituent of mine who came to my office in tears. She was a single mom struggling to pay for the increasing cost of hydro, rent and her student loan. She was making minimum wage and was doing everything in her power to meet the constant demands of various collection agencies. She had been told so much rubbish that she was even hesitant to accept any help at all from my office. Every debt service agency she had listened to prior only made her situation worse. She even refused to give my office her phone numbers out of fear that they would somehow be passed on to a collection agency. If I remember correctly, Mr. Speaker, this lady had lost a job due to calls from collection agencies at her workplace, which is completely unacceptable, extremely unfair and must be outlawed.

A definite weakness of this bill is that it does little to ensure that consumers aren't targets of bully collection agencies after a debt settlement is signed. An improvement would be to ensure that a debt settlement contract makes the chosen settler—after all, this is what you pay these companies for—the recipient of the collection calls after the contract is signed. This bill doesn't do that.

The second act this bill deals with is the Consumer Protection Act and stricter laws for door-to-door water heater sales. While absolutely a great initiative in theory, as we've all heard stories about door-to-door sales tactics, there are weaknesses to this part of the legislation as well. To begin with, I'd like to reiterate that I find it odd that the government has singled out water heater sales. While important, this bill would be much more effective if it addressed all types of door-to-door salespeople, but again, it's something that I think could be dealt with at committee.

Too many of my constituents, mostly seniors, have been taken advantage of by door-to-door water heater sales workers. How it usually works is that they sign a contract at the door, the new tank is immediately installed and their old tank is removed almost immediately. If the homeowner has second thoughts and wants to exercise the right to cancel the contract within the current 10-day cooling off period, they're stuck, as they no longer have a hot water heater; it was removed right away. Creating stricter restrictions for cancellations and returns of water heaters is something that this bill does not address.

Another amendment in the bill is the doubling of the cooling-off period from 10 to 20 days. I believe this is

also short-sighted and needs some work. While I can understand the intent of the change, I don't think it accomplishes anything or, for that matter, was entirely thought through. Similar to a 10-day cooling-off period, which is the current period, the 20-day cooling-off period still rests on the assumption that the consumer will agree to the contract, because that's when the cooling-off period begins, and then during that period go back and research what it is they just signed. Twenty days is not long enough for a problem to materialize in most cases. In fact, in 20 days, they won't even have their first bill. If the consumer were willing to sign the contract in the first place, they likely had trust in what they were signing and wouldn't necessarily question it right away. Ten days, 20 days, there's really no difference to me, and it's something that I think needs to be revisited, and we'd like to hear more from the people of Ontario.

Another huge problem that I don't think this bill does too much to deal with is high-pressure sales tactics that exploit consumers. If the bill were to focus more on ensuring that people are being told honest, true and correct information in the first place, then there would be no need to create regulations to help cancel contracts at all—or very little need. The problem is that workers are going door to door using high-pressure sales tactics. Full cost disclosure and cancellation fees and penalties are not a big part of their sales pitch, Mr. Speaker, as you can imagine. This bill needs to focus more on ensuring that consumers are given full disclosure about what they're getting into before they even sign the contract. The government has not inserted any mandatory follow-up or cost disclosure in a door-to-door contract into this legislation but, rather, has simply created regulation-making powers to do so. So, once again, we have to trust the government.

As I mentioned earlier, I'm hesitant to support regulation-making powers for this government, as they often are quick to introduce regulations or make changes without looking at the big picture. It's good to have clear, concise laws so they can't be changed on a whim. It's also most fair for businesses this way.

In addition, I am concerned that these types of door-to-door salespeople have made it different for legitimate canvassers like the cancer society or March of Dimes. I find that, as a society, we have become weary of anyone approaching us, and for charities, for example, it has likely resulted in fewer donations at the door. This is a definite result of poor consumer protection, and it's a big problem.

Rather than just extend the cooling-off period, that I don't think does too much of anything, we need to come up with a real solution.

All in all, I think this legislation is a good start but, not unlike many bills past and current from this government, we have yet another piece of legislation that is heavy on presentation but light on content. We all agree that improvements to consumer protection are in the best interests of everyone—that's a given—but it's the meat and

bones of the bill that really do matter. In my opinion, as I said before, we've got some work to do.

I'll be supporting this bill, Mr. Speaker, but I look forward to further discussion in committee and, in particular, discussion around what my colleague from Simcoe North said in his remarks a few minutes ago, around enforcement of the bill. We have thousands of bills and hundreds of thousands of regulations on the books in Ontario, and so often you find they're not enforced; they're not known about. People don't know their rights and they don't know where to turn. In turn, they turn to us, and we turn to police, and they're far too busy.

I don't know who's going to be the consumer protection people out there, but it's weak now in the province. It's based on a complaints basis or it's based on, "You get screwed and then you try and get a resolution."

We need proactive legislation that gives full disclosure at the door, cleans up these industries and covers more than the hot water industry.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Again, I'm faced with the same difficulty at this point in the day. We've discussed this bill to such a degree that it calls in question if we're really using our time here efficiently.

I ask the members of this chamber to assess whether or not we need to continue the discussion. I think we can move on to other issues. There's a number of issues, I think, that are quite relevant and are quite demanding and in need of discussion.

One of the issues is, when we talk about protecting our consumers, another area that we need to protect is our labourers. An area that needs great protection is precarious employment. I spoke about it earlier today during my member's statement, the fact that we have a province where there's a vast number, a majority of people, who don't have permanent employment. More people in this province are working in temporary positions than are working in permanent positions. That's a serious problem. If we want to see our province advance, see our province progress, then we need to have a province in which people have permanent, full-time jobs.

There was a great study released by United Way, in coordination with McMaster, discussing the connection between well-being, sense of identity and the protection against poverty: the link between all those factors and whether you have permanent employment or not.

These are areas and discussions that we should be having in this House. Discussing this bill any further, in my humble opinion, is not necessary, so let's move this on to second reading and continue with some other robust discussions about how we can improve this province.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mrs. Laura Albanese: I'm glad to add my comments to this discussion on Bill 55.

We have debated this bill for almost 18 hours now. This bill is about stronger protection for Ontario con-

sumers. This is what we're discussing here. I think we've debated this at length at this point. We want to move on and perhaps take some action in committee in improving the bill. I would encourage all my colleagues to send this bill to committee as soon as possible so that we can make all the improvements that we've been talking about here during second reading and we can get that stronger protection to Ontario residents as soon as possible. I think they deserve that. That's what they expect from us.

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The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Norm Miller: Let me, first of all, begin by congratulating the newly elected members. I haven't had a chance to do that yet. John Fraser, Mitzie Hunter, Percy Hatfield, Peggy Sattler and especially, of course, from our PC Party, Doug Holyday—congratulations to all the newly elected members.

The member for Simcoe—Grey, I think, made a lot of good points in his speech to Bill 55, in particular talking about the narrow scope of this bill that deals with water heaters. Certainly, there is a problem with water heaters. My own mother had a rental water heater in her home and had a heck of a time being able to get rid of it when she did want to end the contract. We've all heard horror stories, but I would agree with the member from Simcoe—Grey that it shouldn't be just about water heaters. It should be about all door-to-door sales that go on.

I also agree with him—I think he made an excellent point—on the change this bill makes for the cooling-off period from 10 days to 20 days. While that may be a positive move, it really, as he pointed out, doesn't even get beyond the first bill, and that's likely when the consumer will recognize what they've signed, when they get their first bill. So I think this should deal more with all high-pressure sales tactics. As the member for Simcoe—Grey said, there should be more full disclosure before they sign a contract. I do agree with him; the bill is light on content. I think he has made a lot of good points.

I look forward to this bill wrapping up shortly and going to committee so these changes and others might be put forward and hopefully adopted so it actually has some meat to it and gives more consumer protection than the narrow focus that it has right now.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: Speaker, we've heard some rumblings about, "Let's get your bill moved on," and, "We've got to carry on the business of the House," and that's right. We all have to do that. But we are here today, discussing this bill, and a lot of the members opposite in the Conservative Party have spoken to the bill, and I'm glad to hear what they have to say.

There is something, though, that we should address, too, that we kind of maybe overlooked right now: that consumer protectionism is going to affect everyone. It affects us now, it affects seniors and it affects the generation coming, which is our children. So we need to have

legislation that is going to protect consumers so that when they are being taken advantage of, then people have some kind of recourse to say, "You know what? My rights have been violated. This is a law, and I can act upon it."

Another thing we should be doing, Speaker, and there has been some discussion about it, is educating the generation that we have now. Our children, our grandchildren, should be educated on contracts, on consumer services, on how to manage their money a little bit so that way they don't face themselves having to go to a debt-settlement service agency, on how to interpret a contract so they're not going to end up signing on the dotted line and having to pay thousands of dollars out that they weren't aware of.

Part of that, as well, I think, when we get to committee—it would be a good discussion to have—is talking about passing on our knowledge to the generation coming forward, so that we can have better awareness of consumer protectionism overall, because we're all debating this legislation, but we need to bring awareness to it so that people can use it.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That concludes the time for questions and comments, and I return to the member for Simcoe—Grey for his response.

Mr. Jim Wilson: I appreciate the comments about the bill and about the business in this House, as the PC House leader. I just tell those who are growing impatient on the first day back after three months of not being here: Jesus, people. I know you don't like to work, some of you, but we've only been debating for two hours and five minutes this afternoon, and I guess a lot of that time was taken up with petitions and routine proceedings.

I guess the first hour and three quarters is killing some of you. That's fine. You don't have to be here. You can tell your constituents you don't want to be here and you don't want to debate important bills.

I assume the bill is important because we've debated it for quite a few hours and the government, rather than doing anything about the half-million people who woke up without a job this morning, or having a new jobs plan, a debt-and-deficit crisis plan or bringing in legislation to freeze wages right across the public sector, including our own for a couple of more years, to deal with the real issues of Ontario—what did the Premier say over the last two weeks and again this morning about her priorities? It's the Local Food Act. But if you wanted some things to speed up here, why doesn't the government House leader say, "Let's agree to pass the Local Food Act with the member for Sarnia's amendment, which deals with giving a 25% tax credit to food banks"? That's how you negotiate with the opposition. Throw in the member for Nepean's farming literacy section, and then we could get that bill through real quick.

But your House leader doesn't do that. Maybe he doesn't tell you that. He doesn't deal with us. He just acts like the government and says, "There's the bill, and on its merit you should pass it. By the way, we're the government and we have a right to pass legislation." Well,

folks, you're in a minority. If you want us to do some other acts, why don't you come forward with the member for Whitby-Oshawa's disability all-party committee that we want to set up and exchange that for some co-operation in the House? Co-operation's a one-way street here, and that should be the nickname of the Liberal Party.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Mr. Taras Natyshak: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's really great to see you back—

Interjections.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: Oh, this is 10 minutes. All right.

Interjection.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: I can do 10. I can do an hour. I could filibuster this, but I certainly won't because—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I am advised that you've already spoken to the second reading of this bill and, therefore, I must ask you to sit down.

Further debate?

Mr. Michael Harris: Good afternoon. It is good to be back here at Queen's Park with, of course, many of my colleagues, and a special mention to those new colleagues who are joining us from the five ridings across Ontario. I know they'll be excited on their first day. I know when I first showed up here at Queen's Park, I was excited to stand up and most proud to do so, representing my community of Kitchener-Conestoga, and I know they will too when they have their opportunity to speak, if they've not already done so today.

Bill 55 has many good propositions which attempt to add some clarity for consumers looking for debt settlement services, buying or selling a house and protecting them from misleading salespeople. Although Bill 55, Stronger Protection for Ontario Consumers Act, sounds like it would benefit a great deal of consumer transactions, it is quite limited to debt settlement companies, hot water tank salespeople and speaks to the real estate industry. Of course, we look forward to working with this bill in committee, to add the other products and services to ensure that this bill is all that its name says it is. After all, we wouldn't want to write legislation that sounds great while it lacks the protection, accountability and transparency consumers are expecting with Bill 55.

All irony and joking aside, Bill 55 attempts really to tackle three key objectives: first, protecting Ontarians from debt settlement companies; second, giving greater rights to consumers who are approached by door-to-door hot water heater salespeople; three, then changing the restrictions on homebuyers and sellers to ensure that each party is getting the good, quality real estate service at the best possible price.

First, I'd like to discuss the credit counselling portion of the bill. I'm sure we can all recall a debt settlement commercial on television: big promises, little input, large gains. It often leaves us scratching our heads on how this company can help you pay down your debt with no extra cost. In times of desperation, however, these statements

are enough for some to be convinced to reach for the phone. The result: Far too many people losing a wad of money and not getting anything resolved but, rather, getting sued by their creditors, having nowhere to turn. Unfortunately, Ontario lacks legislation to prevent companies from making these idealistic yet unrealistic claims. Ontarians are entering debt settlement contracts embarrassed, lost and uninformed. With the average Canadian consumer debt load hitting a new high of \$27,000 just this past February, 2013, government must ensure that there are mechanisms in place to protect those whose judgment is clouded by desperation.

1510

Bill 55 would mandate that all contracts be in writing, set a cap on the fee that may be charged for debt settlement services, and prohibit debt settlers from charging upfront fees. It establishes a 10-day cooling-off period. It would forbid collection agencies or collectors from making false, misleading or deceptive statements in any type of media, and it establishes penalties.

As I mentioned before, it also attempts to address the hot water heater sales that I know Ontarians are concerned about by putting greater regulation on door-to-door sales, specifically with regard to hot water tanks. Just last summer, the government issued 400 charges to two hot water tank companies. The charges included failure to deliver a valid contract, failure to refund, unfair practices dealing with payment for home energy audits, misleading deals through false government rebates, false incentives, and fake signing bonuses. On top of that, these companies did not deliver on contracts to install water heaters after payment for consumers across southern Ontario.

I've spoken to many seniors, in fact, in my community of Kitchener-Conestoga about it, and clearly, you know what? These folks have shown up at the door, and they will do or say anything, really, to get this transaction. You know, when seniors in their own homes who want to continue living there in their senior years are intimidated, the first thing they do is reluctantly agree, and they find themselves in this mess.

In fact, in my own riding, as I had mentioned, Kitchener Utilities has taken over 600 complaint calls from their customers being told they must switch to another water heater company due to several misleading or false statements made by salespeople from another company. In fact, they said a few examples that they used in going door-to-door: "Your water heater is not glass-lined," which is, of course, false, because all water heaters are or else the water would be rusty.

They say or they try to claim that the water heater is not an Energy Star, which, of course, all Kitchener Utilities water heaters are. They've even used fear tactics, saying that if the homeowner didn't change their water heater, it could explode like the one on Activa Avenue. We had a house that exploded just recently in Kitchener. This strikes one's emotions, and reluctantly they agree. Of course, that case is still under

investigation, but you can imagine what a senior living alone, if they were told this, would think.

Another was that they had claimed Kitchener Utilities was going out of business and they were taking over their services, and that they could die from carbon monoxide poisoning with the venting on their current water heater.

The list of deceptive statements and fear tactics goes on, to the point where customers feel harassed or even threatened.

I actually had the opportunity to meet with a representative of Kitchener Utilities, and they said that their customers would come into the office sometimes in tears because the harassment from these other salespeople was in fact so bad. Some of the homeowners who were pressured into buying a new hot water heater were left stuck in a contract that was not the one they had signed up for, or even had two contracts, one with the original company and the other, of course, with the new. When customer would call or write to cancel their new contract, customer service would simply avoid responding.

Needless to say, Kitchener Utilities and many residents in Kitchener-Conestoga are happy to see Bill 55 move past second reading.

Of course, the final section with the bill relates to real estate and restrictions against charging both a fee and a commission for selling or buying a home. Ontario is the last province in Canada to have a restriction against custom charges in real estate. Allowing a combination of fees and commissions to be charged on a real estate transaction will allow agents to compete more freely in hopes to gain more business. This will also allow buyers and sellers to receive the highest-quality work at the best possible price.

The last part of the section of the bill deals with phantom bids and protecting buyers. With the housing demand going up, of course, in my region, and the supply going down, homebuyers already carry the stress of not finding a home to fit their lifestyle and budget. Some realtors use this to their advantage, knowing that bidders are likely to respond emotionally rather than rationally when put under pressure. We've seen that this is the case through many of the stories we've already heard throughout the debate. Realtors create phantom bids, raising the price of the house to receive a higher commission in the end. Being a "phantom bid" means that the bid does not exist, but the buyers don't have proof of this.

Bill 55 would make law what the Real Estate Council of Ontario has tried to make code in the Real Estate and Business Brokers Act. Unfortunately, this hasn't stopped all realtors from pocketing a higher commission off of a fake competitor in a bidding war. Right now, RECO has the power to investigate so-called phantom bids, but only four agents have ever been disciplined for the practice over the last decade, while the cases of overbidding are, in fact, numerous.

For most of us, a home is the largest, longest and most important transaction, in fact, we will ever make. That is why there should be laws in place to make this process as transparent and accountable to the seller and the buyer as

possible. We have all heard of the phantom bid in Toronto that was about to swindle \$90,000 over the \$1-million asking price. Well, just imagine you have been searching for a new home for over a year in a new city, your job starts in two weeks, and your kids' schooling starts in a week. The perfect house comes along, your agent is preparing the paperwork, and everything seems to be falling into place—until another offer comes knocking. Examples like these make buyers act in haste.

RECO says that phantom bids are more than financially straining; they pressure buyers to forgo a home inspection in anticipation of being beat out in the competition. So maybe you didn't end up paying \$90,000 more, but you did end up buying a new home that perhaps needed a new roof just a few years down the road or that didn't meet the electrical code.

I know I'll have more time in my two-minute summary to finish my remarks on that. Those are some of the concerns that I have heard on this particular bill, especially from those folks at Kitchener Utilities whom I had the opportunity to meet. I'll conclude in the next two minutes.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments: the member for Essex.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: I thank you once again, Mr. Speaker, and it is great to see you in the chair, as it is great to see all of my colleagues here, who I'm sure are excited to get back to work, as I am today. I'm excited to welcome some new colleagues, in particular the two who have joined our caucus—Percy Hatfield from Windsor-Tecumseh and Peggy Sattler from London West—who I'm certain will make an indelible mark on this Legislature.

Mr. Speaker, as you know, I stood to speak, just prior, thinking that I was able to do a two-minute hit. As you indicated, I've already spoken to this bill, as have many members in this Legislature. We are all, I think in the majority, on the record as offering our ideas, our comments and concerns about the nature of this bill. I think it is due time that it proceed on its way to committee, where various amendments that have been proposed throughout the debate can be debated once again at committee. It's high time that members of our communities, from Essex to Windsor-Tecumseh—all throughout Ontario—see some real action out of this Legislature, action that is matched with expediency, that is cognizant that, for far too long, this Legislature has been mired in a stalled position, as we debate various scandals and expenditure scandals that have arisen.

I don't think people have the time or the appetite for that any longer. They want to see us get through legislation, work it out, well-nuanced, put it forward for a vote and make it happen. That is certainly what our caucus intends to do throughout this session in order to deliver results for the people of our province.

I'm certain that members heard this time and time again over the summer recess: that life really isn't getting better. Jobs still haven't surged to the point where we

need them, to create good, sustainable communities. There's so much work to be done.

Certainly, we on this side of the House are ready to do that. Expediting this bill through the chamber is one measure that we can infuse some confidence back into the House.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments.

Mr. Bill Mauro: I want to thank the member from Kitchener-Conestoga for his comments today, but like others—for reasons known only to the official opposition, the Conservatives continue to rag the puck on this particular piece of legislation. As I understand it, the total debate time has approached somewhere in the area of 18 hours now.

1520

For people that are interested in following this issue on TV, this is a significant piece of consumer protection legislation that, in my time here—and others have spoken to this in the previous session—I haven't heard anything of consequence that people are concerned with.

We're not sure why the Conservatives will not allow this legislation to get into committee. If there are issues of consequence that the official opposition would like to deal with, they could certainly deal with it there. We could expedite this consumer protection legislation back into the House for third reading and get it passed in no time.

For people that are following, I just want to mention what it is, with a little bit of detail. High-pressure door-to-door sales: Whose constituency office, of those here in the Legislature, has not had to deal with this huge issue on a regular basis? I can certainly tell you that mine, in Thunder Bay-Atikokan, has spent a great deal of time on door-to-door salesmen issues. It's a very high-pressure situation. Quite frankly, most often it seems that the seniors in our communities are the ones that seem to be most vulnerable. In my riding, in Thunder Bay-Atikokan, it's most often seniors who come into our constituency office, that I and my office staff have been trying to help. This is a piece of consumer protection legislation that would help them in that regard.

It also deals with debt settlement services and the very difficult circumstances that the indebted constituents and consumers in the province of Ontario find themselves in, as well as other issues with the real estate field.

Speaker, we're proud of the legislation as a government. It's a great piece of consumer protection legislation. We would really appreciate the co-operation of the opposition to get it into committee, make changes as we see fit and bring it back to the House for third reading.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Bill Walker: It's always a pleasure to bring remarks on behalf of my colleague from Kitchener-Conestoga. I think he does an exceptional job on behalf of his constituents to make sure we hold the Liberals to account at every opportunity.

The Liberals and the NDP have stood in this House today and criticized us for coming here and doing our jobs, and that's to debate legislation that they're putting forward on the docket. We're going to do that. What it also affords us is a chance, and it's important that we make sure we look at consumer protection and accountability very clearly.

In today's media package, there was a story here about Premier Wynne's life partner being involved in the Osborne Group and taking a fairly significant salary out of there for a number of years. That money did not go to kids with some autism challenges.

This opportunity, when we stand and rise in this House, is the time for us to make sure that people at home do know we're holding them to account. We are paying attention on the bigger issues—not just those that today are on the docket, but on the bigger issues, and this is one of significant concern.

It should be noted that the McGuinty government fought a move in court to extend intensive therapy for autistic kids beyond age six. We still don't know why that is, because they're not forthcoming in telling us. A salary of the CEO of \$200,000-plus: That money could be going to autistic kids.

We do need consumer protection. We need protection for everyone out there, and that's what we're here to do, to ensure that the Liberals can't just keep slamming stuff through like the Green Energy Act, which they floated through during the cover of darkness and is significantly, negatively impacting our communities across this great province.

We need to ensure that there's accountability. We need to ensure that there's consumer protection at every stance. My colleague from Kitchener-Conestoga has done it. My colleague from Simcoe-Grey, I think, had a great line: This is heavy on presentation, light on context.

We want to get it to committee so that we can actually have some advancements made and make sure that it truly does. There needs to be enforcement, which my colleague from Simcoe North also said. We do want it to get there, but we want to make sure that we're doing our job. We'll stand here every day, protecting the people that sent us to Queen's Park, and we'll be proud of it.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): We still have time for one more question or comment.

I recognize the member for Algoma-Manitoulin.

Mr. Michael Mantha: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker—

Mr. Bill Walker: The Chi-Cheemaun is running.

Mr. Michael Mantha: Yes, it is. The Chi-Cheemaun is running. I want to thank my friend from Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound. We did some fantastic work on that together. It just goes to show that when you work together, you can accomplish quite a few things.

I also want to thank the minister for having listened to both of our messages—and not just our messages; it's the people that sent us here to actually do our job. We did do our job—kudos to you—and I'm doing my job here today.

We work great together, but we also criticize each other quite well as well. I always enjoy it when my friend tells me that the NDP are trying to push this into committee. I just want to remind my colleague here that I'm always in my chair, listening. That's also part of this job: Listening to what people are saying. That's from the opposition; that's also from the government and from your colleagues. These wonderful things we have on the sides of our heads—I remind people of this every single opportunity that I have—are called ears. Some of us hear with them; others listen with them. And there is a difference. Listening is that you actually appreciate what people are saying and you start understanding and really listening to what the message is that people are bringing forward. I'm listening to you, my friend, I really am, every opportunity that I have. I enjoy listening to everybody in this House. Although sometimes I don't rise on every occasion, I am always listening. That's my job. People from Algoma-Manitoulin appreciate, when I go back home, that we can hold a dialogue; we can have a discussion. And when we're talking about consumer protection, we are listening. I am listening to them.

It's very important that we get this back to our constituencies. Working together—all of us here—is what Ontarians want us to do.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Thank you for those questions and comments. I return to the member for Kitchener-Conestoga for his response.

Mr. Michael Harris: I'm happy to conclude my remarks with regard to Bill 55. Of course, I'd like to thank my colleagues who have had the opportunity to provide some comments to my initial 10 minutes on this piece of legislation.

I do find it a bit disturbing when members of the government say we shouldn't be taking our opportunity to stand up and speak on behalf of our communities with regard to a specific piece of legislation. I know that when I met with stakeholders on this particular bill in my riding and in my constituency office, I did tell them point-blank that I would be speaking to the bill; that I would be communicating some of the concerns they had and, of course, some of the examples they highlighted that there is a need for this. And here is my opportunity to do that. To suggest that I not do that would be, I believe, in fact letting my community down.

They're the ones who sent me here to stand up and speak on their behalf. I've taken that opportunity now to have those comments on the record in this forum and communicate or relay those important messages that were communicated to me. I won't hesitate to continue to speak to bills of all nature to ensure that my community in Kitchener-Conestoga, the constituents there, have that mechanism or forum to be able to communicate their concerns and comments, good or bad, with regard to a certain piece of legislation.

There's no doubt that there's consensus that we need to get this into committee. I look forward to working with the government on, in fact, building this bill to not only include door-to-door salespeople of hot water heaters, but

other services that I believe we've heard as well, like paving companies, vacuum salespeople, energy offsets and lawn care.

Of course, I want to thank the minister and member from Pickering-Scarborough East for bringing forward this piece of legislation. I look forward to adding my further comments in committee.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: It's a pleasure to be here, to rise today and to debate. I want to thank my colleague from Kitchener-Conestoga for his enlightened remarks. I can tell that he spent a good deal of the summer break in his constituency talking about these very matters with his constituents. I know him to be a very valued colleague, and I appreciate his comments.

Just a quick one to the member from Thunder Bay-Atikokan earlier in debate: The reason we are discussing this bill is so that we can debate it and each member has an opportunity to provide insight and have the time to speak and consult with their constituents over such matters. I think that is why I like to take the time to be part of a political debate such as this one, particularly as it pertains to stronger protection for Ontario consumers.

Before I get into my remarks on some of the areas that I'd like to talk about, today was a special day in this assembly when we welcomed five new members to this chamber, to this place. I would like, on behalf of our colleagues, to congratulate Doug Holyday, the former deputy mayor of Toronto, for joining us. Mr. Holyday provided our party with, I think, an excellent injection of excitement and enthusiasm, particularly given the fact that he is from the wonderful city of Toronto, where many of us spend a great deal of our time. Of course, he brings with him, I think, a background and record of achievement that many members in this assembly would like to emulate, particularly as it comes to consumer protection and taxpayer protection. I admire the work that he did at the city of Toronto, I'm delighted that he is on our team and I want to thank him for being here with us today and for every other day moving forward. It is with that in mind that I think I will bridge my remarks to this consumer protection act and just some of the things I think aren't here.

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In general, obviously, Speaker, I support this. I think the title says an awful lot: the protection for Ontario consumers act. But I looked through the bill, and I looked through some of the initiatives that are going to be undertaken, and I do notice that there are some glaring absences. I will say this: In terms of the consumer protection act, I think that we have an opportunity as an assembly to do a little bit more in teaching young consumers how to prepare for the world after high school, after university and to buy their first home; and teach them how to read the fine print in contracts, whether that is with a bank, whether that is with another corporation, or whether that is simply understanding whatever they're doing in terms of their own family budget. We're not

doing that, and as the Ontario PC education critic, I have advocated for greater reforms in financial literacy in our school system. I think that has been met with a great deal of support.

I know that in our recent white paper that I had provided to the assembly, but also more directly to our PC caucus, I called for those types of reforms. I was pleased, recently, Speaker, to work with the Economic Club of Canada and their Jr. Economic Club, as well as many corporations like Visa, Scotiabank, CIBC, Sun Life and Porter air, to talk about how we can encourage younger students to carry on a lifelong love of learning about financial literacy so that when they are consumers with big cellphone contracts and homes, they will actually understand the contracts that they are signing—what those terms are and why interest rates will go up. I think that's where we have to start, so when you talk about, for example, door-to-door sales, debt settlement and even real estate, they are in a better financial position because they understand the gravity of these contracts that they will be signing. I think that is a key, and one very absent area, that we could be building upon right here, so I would encourage the minister, Ms. Mac-Charles, to consider talking to the Minister of Education and possibly even the finance minister in order for us to develop a made-in-Ontario curriculum that will help students across Ontario.

Now, Speaker, I know you're aware that I've had, from time to time, a private member's bill on grow-ops and clandestine drug operations, as it pertains to real estate, and the homes that have been resold that were actually occupied by somebody with a clandestine drug operation and how unhealthy that is for children who either live around or in one of those grow operations. It's very dangerous for our police—many of them are booby-trapped—and for the next owner. There is significant damage to the structure, both through mould and through the air particles that are there. I noticed in this bill, for example, that we're not talking about that extended consumer protection for homeownership in order to ensure that those houses are sound and that they are remediated. So I think that there was an opportunity here for the minister to have that included in the bill or at least to have that abridged discussion on this floor so that we could ensure that children in our communities who are either exposed to or living in a clandestine drug operation are protected and the future homeowners are actually protected as well.

But I do notice that there is a desire here by members of all parties to enhance consumer protection in our province, and that is something that we can build upon, something that we should be discussing. That's why I take exception to the comment by the member from Thunder Bay. I think that it is incumbent upon all of us as members of the assembly, particularly on this very first and important day back in the assembly, to talk about issues we were dealing with, with our constituents.

I would be remiss, Speaker, if I were not to mention hydro prices in terms of consumer protection. One of the

things I heard time and time again over the last few months has been about hydro prices and protecting consumers who are dealing with these and struggling with these high hydro rates. I will go back to the fact that we still have to have a very honest and open discussion on those cancelled gas plants. We still don't have all of the details, nor do we have all of the information in terms of how much this is going to actually cost the taxpayer base or, in my opinion, the consumer of our hydro. That's why today I had a question in question period, and I asked the Premier if she would release the information and the results from the Auditor General's report. Now, of course, she's going to say, "I don't have it." But we all know that she has seen a draft of that; that's how it works in government. The Premier and the minister's office see that. In addition to that, in that very critical information, I think we will find that it will be better to protect consumers in the long run through government accountability measures.

That auditor's report is important, but so too is what I would consider a hallmark of accountability on this issue, which is what my leader, Tim Hudak, has been calling for, and that is a judicial inquiry. I think that would support consumers who are consuming hydro in this province and who are bearing these incredibly high energy rates as a result of mismanagement by the government. I think that is something that we should be exploring here. That is why I took the opportunity, after being away in my community for the past several months, in Nepean-Carleton to talk to the people of the city of Ottawa and others who were concerned that they have not received the level of protection of their taxpayer dollars that they expect of a government.

Speaker, I recognize, with the short time that I have left and the limited time that I have left, that we have an opportunity, as we move forward in this assembly with five new members and a desire from all members to seek consumer protection, and that there are other serious matters that we must also include in this discussion and in this debate. As I said, we are in a very good position with people like Mr. Holyday, who has joined us from Toronto City Hall, where they were able to protect the taxpayer or, as we would say here in this debate, the consumer.

We do know that there are opportunities with financial literacy that should be explored and enhanced in this province, and we do know, for example, that in real estate there is more that can be done with clandestine grow operations—all absent from this bill. If we were to have a sober second thought, look at some of the enhancements that we could make to this legislation once it goes to committee and have a renewed focus on consumer protection as a whole, I think that we could get somewhere as an assembly.

Speaker, in the short minute that I have left, I want to thank you for the opportunity to debate here today. One of the greatest experiences any member of the Legislature can have is to stand on this floor and bring their views and the views of their constituents to the great

debate in this great House, which has withstood hundreds of years, many debates, many political parties and many various governments.

With that, I again want to thank you. It has been a pleasure to engage in this debate, and I would be remiss not to acknowledge the hard work of my colleague and next-door neighbour in eastern Ontario, Jim McDonell, our critic from Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry, for the great work that he has done in looking into this bill, analyzing it and providing our caucus with a briefing. Thank you very much, Speaker. I look forward to any questions my colleagues may have.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments.

Mr. Phil McNeely: I'm pleased to rise in the House to speak to Bill 55, the Stronger Protection for Ontario Consumers Act, 2013. I hope it's 2013, because we have to move this forward to committee. We've been talking about it long enough. It deals with consumers who are getting taken by certain businesses, and we have to protect the consumer. We can't keep talking about it. We can't miss 2013. We have to get it into legislation. It's good legislation.

It was a major issue. I heard about people in the military getting taken with this in my own riding of Ottawa–Orléans; they ended up with two hot water tanks. These people are just not very professional in what they're doing, not very concerned about the ethics of their work.

I think we have to get it in place. We have to bring this legislation forward. We can't keep talking about it. Let's get it into committee. If there are issues that have to be improved, that's the time to do it. Get the issues improved, and get it into law in this province so that we protect our consumers. This is something to do.

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You start talking about clandestine grow operations and other things like that. That's not part of this bill, and we have to deal with what we want to do here, deal with protection under door-to-door sales and debt settlement services. These are areas which require our attention and require our work. Let's get the talking stopped and get this into committee, make the changes we have to and get on with legislation that's going to protect the consumers, that's needed by the consumers in the province of Ontario. Every one of us knows how people have been taken under both these areas that we're going to correct. Thank you, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Jim McDonell: I'd like to take a second or two just to welcome the five new members to the Legislature. In my short time here, it has been a real privilege to represent the people of Ontario. I know that they'll look forward to it and do their best at it.

On our bill here, Bill 55, stronger protection, there are some issues here that we have to bring forward. I know there's some discussion from some of the members about pushing this bill through. I think it's important that we

talk about this bill. I think that we're elected here, as these new members would see, to have the opportunity to bring the views from our ridings. The honourable member from Nepean–Carleton, whom I worked closely with this summer in many of the activities, is well respected in her riding. For her, her attention to detail and to the response that she gives to her residents, because I think it's important that—I try to work as hard and try to fill some big shoes there.

We look back. Going around in the summer, I heard a lot of people talking about things. Unfortunately, you would think they'd be talking about some of these existing bills like consumer protection, because it is important. But no, they were talking about scandals at Queen's Park, gas plants, wanting to know what we were doing to get to the bottom of it. They're getting tired of it. I think that that talks about the politics of Ontario. They've taken them off where the politicians should be, but they're reflecting on what's happened in this government over the last 10 years as colouring us all in the opposition parties, and I guess I take an insult to that because I don't think that's what we're about. I think we are about accountability and we are about things like consumer protection. We want to move on with those things and we want to see it get to committee. But many people on this side want the opportunity to stand up and talk for their constituents as well. Thank you for this opportunity.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. John O'Toole: Out of respect to the member from Nepean–Carleton, I get up and acknowledge the remarks and the passion that she puts forward in this House. When it comes to an activist on our side of the House, Ms. MacLeod certainly takes issues very strongly, very seriously and very competently I should say. In talking about this consumer protection bill and the three schedules, I think clearly, at the end of it, it all comes down to the idea of being accountable because that's what these three pieces of a consumer protection bill really are about, is protecting the consumer.

Now, who is the consumer? Ultimately, at the end of the day, the taxpayer, indeed the young pages, the new pages here, are why we're here. Now we do want accountability, but when I look at some of the clippings, and the three schedules here aren't directly related, but I was so disappointed when I saw this clipping from the Toronto Sun today. Maybe some of the Liberal members, the few that are here, would listen. The title is, "Meanwhile, Wynne's Spouse Cashed In." This article is from the media, so it's partially if not totally true. "Jane Rounthwaite—Premier Wynne's partner of 25 years—not only served for ... two years—during 2010 and 2011—as the interim director of program services for" an agency, Osborne Group. During that time, the government moved the funding to that agency by 60%.

At the same time, we have complaints in this article about children with autism not getting coverage. That's the kind of consumer protection I'm here to fight for.

That's the kind of consumer protection our education critic is here for. This government should be held accountable for their lack of respect for consumers in Ontario. Just look at the outrage in Ontario.

Interjection.

Mr. John O'Toole: The new government whip, Mr. Flynn, is talking here, and he should more frequently listen—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Thank you very much. Questions and comments?

Mr. Taras Natyshak: I just caught the last part of the member from Durham's comments. He's always a passionate spokesperson for his party and certainly for his riding. I appreciate his comments. He spoke to the fact that this government should be held to account for a whole host of issues, many of which we've talked ad nauseam in this place. But that's what we are doing here in the New Democratic Party. We have introduced something that's quite novel, quite pragmatic and quite practical in the Financial Accountability Office—a third party, independent watchdog that has the legislative teeth to scrutinize the expenditures of this government, of this House. And, my goodness, isn't it about time?

So when it comes to plugging those massive holes and those gaps in accountability and opening up the doors to transparency, we in the New Democratic Party are using our voice, our effort and our time to do that. I think, as indicative of those efforts, we were rewarded with two new members in this Legislature. I think the people of this province can see and appreciate that above all—above the rancour that happens in this place—we can still get some things done, accomplish some of those goals and set priorities for this House and for this province.

Mr. Speaker, I can't tell you how happy I was to walk into this place today, well rested, exuberant and filled with a renewed sense of optimism coming from my riding that things can get done. I hope that's the spirit that guides us throughout this second session of the 40th Legislature, and one that I'm certainly willing to put all my effort into.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That concludes our questions and comments. I'm pleased to return to the member for Nepean–Carleton for her response.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Thank you very much, Speaker. It was a real pleasure to hear the comments from my colleague from Ottawa–Orléans, obviously my next-door neighbour in Ottawa. I have one of these interesting ridings in eastern Ontario. I'm almost adjacent to all of the 13 ridings, with the exception of three, and so I do get to see all of my colleagues from time to time. It's so unique in the way that it's situated.

I would like to say thank you to my colleague from Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry, who is also adjacent to my riding. My colleague from Durham, I think, has unparalleled passion in this place. I thought his fiery speech, particularly his defence of autistic children, was very admirable and I think very important. I know I speak for my colleague from Whitby–Oshawa as well.

She and I have had, from time to time, our own voices in that debate, and I know that we're very proud that he added his voice as well. And to my colleague from Essex, it was good of you to join the debate. I appreciate that. I was getting very nervous that you weren't going to step up and that we would have been one person short on the questions and comments, but I see your passion and I appreciate it.

Obviously, consumer protection is something that we all get behind. It's just how it is done. There's a lot of window dressing from time to time but at the very heart of the matter sometimes this government isn't prepared to do that legwork. That's why I'm simply appealing to them today on a bill that I effectively can support. The challenges, though, run much deeper than just this piece of legislation, and the solution is actually starting in high school and perhaps even younger, in elementary school, with a strong and robust program for financial literacy for our children and our young adults so that they are prepared, when those contracts come, to understand the consequences of them when they sign on the dotted line.

I appreciate once again the opportunity to debate on this matter, but if I could leave one, single statement for my colleagues, it is this: Financial literacy will be the key to good consumer protection, and we can all start on that right now.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate? I recognize the member for Carleton–Mississippi Mills.

Mr. Jack McLaren: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise in this House today to speak to Bill 55, the Stronger Protection for Ontario Consumers Act of 2013. Through this bill, the government is proposing to address consumer concerns related to three industries: the water heater, debt settlement and real estate industries.

Let me begin by stating that Progressive Conservatives understand that for a free market to work and for Ontarians to prosper, consumers require confidence and trust in the companies that they do business with, and trust that the government will enforce the rules when businesses engage in deceptive and misleading practices. In addition, it is essential that Ontario have a simple, understandable regulatory framework that provides transparency and accountability to consumers, and certainty and fairness to business owners and operators.

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The vast majority of businesses in Ontario are run by decent, hard-working people who deserve our praise and respect. Unfortunately, there are a small number of bad actors in every industry who use misleading and deceptive practices which often damage the reputation of their industry.

That said, as industries evolve, legislation needs to evolve to reflect changes in business practices, particularly when there are widespread reports of mistreatment and abuse of consumers. We want to be careful, though, that we do not adversely impact honest, hard-working Ontarians in an effort to shut down those few bad actors.

Debt settlement: For example, a vulnerable Ontarian who needs to tackle their debts will sometimes resort to hiring a debt settler. Honest, diligent and experienced debt settlers can be a godsend to consumers in trouble. They bring a wealth of experience, contacts, and alternatives to bankruptcy. For that reason, we must ensure that consumers have access to the goods and services that they desire, including debt settlement services.

As is true of any industry, debt settlers can be honest or not, but currently it is somewhat difficult for the consumer to judge their motives. Ideally, consumers looking to hire a debt settler would do their due diligence, research a number of companies and choose the most appropriate one for their needs. Unfortunately, this is not always how it happens. Debt collectors call, the pressure to find a solution builds, and the thought of bankruptcy terrifies the average consumer, so the promise of a fast, painless, inexpensive resolution is more than a little attractive to consumers in trouble. While no settlement is ever painless, we need to see some serious steps in the legislation to ensure that once a consumer has resorted to a settler, at a minimum they are protected from debt collectors.

As well, I understand that this ministry has heard of issues with respect to agreements between lenders and debt settlers. To that, I would say: One cannot have two masters. Either debt settlers are working for the lenders or they're working for the debtor. They cannot work for both, as it is a conflict of interest. Therefore, consumers deserve to know, before entering into a contract involving their debt, whose interests the company is serving.

The confidence of Ontarians in the ministry and its legislative remit would be better served by enshrining the principle of transparency and requiring the full disclosure of the company funding and directorships to the consumer. However, the minister has chosen to defer such policy to regulations. This is problematic as, with legislation, the opposition parties have an opportunity to publicly identify issues of concern and provide the government with advice on improving the legislation. Regulations, on the other hand, are made behind closed doors and, as such, are much more vulnerable to influence.

With respect to water heaters, we must maintain the focus on what is wrong: the deliberate deception, the hiding of costs, the high-pressure tactics and the exploitation of customers' vulnerabilities by certain bad actors in the door-to-door sales sector.

The minister is doubling the cooling-off period for water heaters, which is one aspect of the ministry's remit. Why not other contracts, such as gym memberships or any other future performance contract? If the purpose is to protect the consumer from incurring onerous cancellation fees, the problem is the fees rather than the cooling-off period. In this case, the bill is a treatment, but not a cure.

Once a new water heater is installed, following 20 days, if the consumer has not sorted out matters with

their current supplier, they often face severe penalties. Cancellation charges can run into the hundreds of dollars. Moreover, the suppliers are free to charge outrageous amounts for damages such as small scratches on 10-year-old tanks.

Aggressive sales tactics are certainly a concern, but let's remember that consumers are taken advantage of in more ways than one. The fact of the matter is that you cannot legislate away deception and vulnerability. We have many laws against undesirable actions. That does not mean people stop behaving badly. We need to strengthen the ministry's enforcement tools and ensure consumers have recourse beyond the court system, since often the ones who are most vulnerable are also the ones who are least able to access the courts.

Doubling the cooling-off period and requiring plain language rests on one assumption: The consumer will understand the ramifications of their actions if they are given 10 additional days to consider the contract. Remember, people tend to complain when things go wrong, which usually means they've encountered difficulties well past the cooling-off period.

Full disclosure and cancellation fees and penalties are also of concern. Many consumers do not complain until a problem materializes, and this bill does not resolve these issues. Consumers need clear rules and open and fair competition.

For example, we've heard of equipment that's been installed for longer than its recommended life. We have heard of the difficulties consumers incur when they try to cancel unwanted services. We've heard that equipment is not maintained or serviced until it malfunctions, often accompanied by a flood leading to property damage. I would have expected some words in this bill to address these issues.

The two largest players in the field are both under investigation by the federal Competition Bureau for steps that they've taken to make it very difficult to cancel long-term contracts. I wanted to point out that one of those players supports this bill.

Prosperity depends on free markets, which foster competition and innovation. This Liberal government does not have faith in free markets and competition, instead believing that centrally planned economies is a better approach. Picking winners and losers is a favourite Liberal pastime. For that reason, I fear this bill will be used by the government to shut down competition, versus the stated claim of protecting homeowners or consumers. We have seen this before: hard-working, honest and dedicated small and medium-sized enterprises regulated out of business for no other reason than bad legislation and regulation. We must be wary of the impulse to micromanage every aspect of the economy if it means shutting down good, honest companies who are providing services that are in demand by consumers.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Questions and comments?

Ms. Catherine Fife: I, too, would like to extend my congratulations to the new members who have joined us

here today. It was just under a year ago that I sat in my seat for the first time, so I understand what you're feeling. But it's a warm welcome you received today, and hopefully that spirit actually continues on as we try to move some legislation forward.

I'd like to say that it's a pleasure to stand up and discuss this particular piece of legislation on consumer protection, but this is the 10th day that we have discussed and debated this piece of legislation. That would be okay if we were saying new things about it, if there was new information, but there isn't. We know that this piece of legislation in particular—these are really just small steps to strengthen consumer protection. We know there's a number of issues that don't even go to the core issue of protecting consumers in the province of Ontario. So it would make sense if we would all come to some kind of consensus to get this to committee so that we can actually make it a strong piece of legislation. That is certainly what we are committed to doing on this side of the House.

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The member from Windsor-Essex actually makes a really good point: that we've come to this House in this renewed Legislature, the 40th Legislature, to try to get some results. We've introduced, in the last budget session, the information on the Financial Accountability Officer, which makes sense. We're pleased, actually, that it came forward today because, unlike the PCs, we are actually trying to get some work done for the people of this province. How could anyone not support the concept, in principle or otherwise; that this Legislature, that this government—based on eHealth, based on Ornge—needs greater financial accountability? You can't. So let's work together. Let's make sure that we have that financial accountability piece in place going forward, so that people can once again have trust in this Legislature.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Questions and comments?

Ms. Mitzie Jacquelín Hunter: Thank you again for the opportunity to address this House for the second time today. There are many businesses in Scarborough-Guildwood that would see the benefit from this added protection that this bill would provide. The Stronger Protection for Ontario Consumers Act provides better protection and, therefore, clearly this bill is going to benefit from further consideration and thought if brought to committee. So I would certainly urge us to move forward and advance this bill so that our businesses and consumers can receive that added benefit and that added protection.

I know from having gone door to door and talking to so many individuals that this type of accountability is what they're seeking and what they're looking for. So, if that is what we desire, I would really urge us to get on with this and move it forward to committee.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member for Stormont-Dundas-South Glengarry.

Mr. Jim McDonell: I'm proud to get up to address my colleague from Carleton-Mississippi Mills. I think he

always has many good things that he brings to this House from his constituents, and we're here to listen to what he's heard, especially over the summer.

He's right. Consumers must trust the companies that they buy their services from. If we don't, it's the ruin of our economy. We have a province with a reputation of good services, good products that is really looked upon around the world with envy, and I'd like to make sure that we keep that type of reputation.

Debt settlers, water heaters and real estate are all issues that need consumer protection. We're here. We want to see this bill go on. There's no question.

I heard somebody mention today that what we really need here is some protection against this government, some of the laws that are going through here. I don't see any laws on the docket to deal with jobs. We've got half a million people in this province who aren't working, so it makes you wonder if there's a need to run through these bills without some closer scrutiny because there's nothing on the docket.

The member from Nepean-Carleton talked about, in the vein of consumer protection, the need to educate our students in high school today towards good financial literacy. I think that's an important point, and we'll look at that in committee.

Issues like the Financial Accountability Officer—my view on that is people elect us to have that position. We're here to hold the government to account. Hiring somebody else who supposedly will have information deleted in front of them and not know—co-operation will do nothing as far as making this government accountable. It's just another person that we'll be paying six figures to, and we could be spending that money in health care or autism or something that they have not done yet.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): We have time for one more question or comment.

Mr. Bill Walker: It's always a pleasure to comment on my colleague from Carleton-Mississippi Mills. He brings his passion to the House every day and always holds the government accountable. I'd like to say that he is so bent on making sure he does the job well that he has his number one consumer critic in the world, his wife Janet, here in the House to make sure that he's doing his job today. We'd like to welcome Janet to the House, holding him to account as well.

I've spoken on this topic a couple of times today, and I'm going to be consistent with what I've said earlier. We need to ensure that the consumer is protected at every step along the way. We need to ensure that this gets to committee. It needs some improvements. They've done some decent work in trying to put some cooling-down periods and some other clauses in, but really what we need to do is get it to committee and ensure that it gets passed quickly and actually in place.

I heard actually not too far back that the Local Food Act was written about eight or nine years ago, and we're still waiting to get that one through, even though they had two majority governments to push that bill, which is their bill, through. Yet they're calling us obstructionists. This

is one of those, Speaker, that I hope we don't go through the same thing with.

As my colleague from Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry just said, we need to ensure that there's a lot of accountability in any legislation that we're passing. There should have been more accountability in things like the gas plant scandal and eHealth, because then those dollars that they boondoggled and wasted, \$600 million—I trust it will be \$1 billion before we get done—could be going to things like hospitals, to our education system, to mental health, which is drastically needed.

I'm really getting inundated recently with people from my riding calling me, saying that they have not gotten services for their children that are drastically needed. Our deputy leader, Christine Elliott, is pushing that forward as much as she can to ensure that we start to address those really significant health care concerns that are out in our communities, and we need to do that.

That is a form of consumer protection as well, ensuring that every dollar that comes into this sacred House is spent in a value-added way, not wasted on partisan need. We need consumer protection at every step of the way. Let's get it to committee. Let's ensure that it puts good practices in place. Let's get it passed.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That concludes the time for questions and comments. I return to the member for Carleton–Mississippi Mills for his reply.

Mr. Jack MacLaren: I would like to thank the people who made comments: our member from Kitchener–Waterloo; the member from Scarborough–Guildwood, who, for the second time today, spoke to the House for the first time—I welcome her to the Legislature; our member from Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry, who is our critic for this area; and the member for Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound, who is my noble seatmate. Thank you very much.

At first glance, one could think, well, this is a bill that doesn't have much depth or much need or all that kind of language, when really we have a large, vulnerable group of people in our community—many different groups. Senior citizens are probably the group that most people would think of first. People who have white hair would be called senior citizens. Sometimes they're very vulnerable, and we need to help these people and protect them, sometimes even from themselves.

But we have others. As mentioned, we have the mentally ill, autistic folks. There's a family in my riding that has an autistic child. Their other child has Asperger's. The cost of looking after their children has bankrupted them twice. They've lost their home. They're in dire financial straits. We have wasted money on all kinds of things like the Green Energy Act etc., when we need to be looking after people.

This bill is aimed at looking after people who are vulnerable, whether they be the families of handicapped folks, the developmentally disabled, the mentally ill or senior citizens. They need our help. Especially the senior citizens group is growing as our population ages. Look around at the white hairs in this room. Many of them are

entering that senior citizen group. We need to help and protect these people. So it's a good bill that, as our population, the baby boomers, grow and become older, there will be more and more need of.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate.

Mrs. Christine Elliott: I appreciate the opportunity to make a few comments with respect to Bill 55. But before I do that, I would also like to extend my congratulations to the five new members who took their seats in the Legislature today and want to wish them well in the work that they are going to be doing in the future here in this Legislature on behalf of their constituents. Certainly, I think we're off to a great start with everyone having been on their feet and speaking today, so we look forward to their continued input on the various matters that we're presented with.

1610

With respect to Bill 55, we've had a lot of speakers this afternoon. This is of course An Act to amend the Collection Agencies Act, the Consumer Protection Act, 2002 and the Real Estate and Business Brokers Act, 2002 and to make consequential amendments to other Acts. The short title of this, of course, is the Stronger Protection for Ontario Consumers Act, 2013, and this bill was introduced by the Minister of Consumer Services here in the Legislature on April 18 of this year.

Of course, as my colleagues on the official opposition side have indicated, we are going to be supporting this bill because anything that strengthens the position of consumers and protects them from fraudulent or improper activities is something that we should support. But, I think, as you will note from some of my comments, we do believe that there are some changes that can be made to this legislation and we will be discussing them once we get into committee, with a view to strengthening this legislation and, of course, giving it more teeth so that it can be fully enforced.

The concept of consumer protection, generally, in the province of Ontario is relatively new. In fact, the first consumer protection legislation was introduced in 1966 as the original Consumer Protection Act. It contained only 35 sections and is vastly different from what we see today, but I think it's fair to say that until fairly recently, as far as consumer sales were concerned, the whole concept of *caveat emptor*, or buyer beware, was the rule rather than the exception. That still applies to many different consumer transactions today because not all of them are covered by this act or even the amendments that we are proposing to make now.

The concept of a cooling-off period, which is really central to a couple of the sections of this act, was really introduced fairly recently and applied in the context—if I remember correctly, and this goes back to 100 years ago when I was in law school—to deal with high-pressure tactics in door-to-door sales of vacuum cleaners. Now, we have it applying to different things today—to water heater contracts and so on—but that's what it was originally meant to be dealing with. Of course, times change,

but the reality remains the same: We want to make sure that vulnerable people are protected from high-pressure sales and that they have the opportunity to back out of a transaction if, upon second thought, they realize that this might not be to their advantage or even financially affordable for them.

So, what does this act deal with? As I said, it isn't a complete protection in all consumer transactions. It deals with several main sections: One, it amends the Collection Agencies Act, specifically with respect to debt settlement service agreements. It really talks about some of the specific provisions that need to be contained in this agreement and, again, provides a 10-day cooling-off period wherein a debtor can cancel the transaction within 10 days if they feel, upon reflection, that this isn't going to be in their best interests.

The act also amends the Consumer Protection Act with respect to unsolicited water heater sales. As I mentioned before, this is like the vacuum cleaner sales from 30 years ago. Again, it specifically indicates some of the things that need to be included in this contract and the kind of disclosure that has to happen, and provides, in this case, a 20-day cooling-off period. We've heard a lot of pretty egregious stories from across the province with respect to the sale of water heaters and water heater contracts, about returning equipment and all sorts of issues relating to that, so this is certainly a welcome protection, although I hope it will be comprehensive. That will be something that we will have the opportunity to talk about once it gets into committee.

Bill 55 also deals with the Real Estate and Business Brokers Act. This is one that I am somewhat familiar with, having practised real estate law for a number of years, and I can only say that the whole concept of dealing with a real estate transaction, particularly when it's the first home that you're buying, is very daunting to consumers—to understand, first of all, what you're buying, especially when you're buying a new home, where there are all kinds of warranties that are going to be included with it; what you do and the steps along the way; who does what? What does your lawyer do for you? What does the bank do for you? How do the two of them work together? How does the closing happen? It's really important that the language be in plain language, that people understand exactly what it is that they're getting and, when it comes to things like commissions, that they understand how the commission is set up.

I would say that the vast majority of transactions that certainly I've been involved with really involve a commission based on a percentage of the sale price. It used to be sort of a standard 5% or 6%. That's gone down fairly dramatically in recent years with competition. I think it's lower than that; 3% or 4%, I think, is more the norm now. But in any case, people at least have knowledge about what the commission is going to be. They're not very happy about the HST part of it, but they know what the base amount of the commission is going to be. But there are some contracts that also provide for a combination, where there's both a set amount as well as a

percentage of the sale price. That's what this particular legislation aims to deal with. You can have one or the other, either a set amount or a percentage commission, but you can't have both. I think that will rule out any confusion in those sorts of contracts.

The act also deals with the concept of the so-called phantom offer. We've heard that in some situations, there are cases where the real estate agent might say to a prospective purchaser, "You'd better get your offer in on this right away or else you're going to lose out, because we know somebody else is bidding in at a higher price." What this act does is require that copies of written offers be kept by the real estate brokerage for a certain period of time so that if someone wants to check to make sure that in fact there have been other offers that have been submitted at higher prices, they will have the opportunity to do that. So it is certainly hoped that that is going to cut down on this sort of feeding frenzy that sometimes happens in real estate transactions, and the concept of a phantom offer that might not actually be the case will be something that consumers can actually check on.

Some of my other colleagues have mentioned that the whole basis of this legislation is to protect vulnerable people in the concept of consumer sales. We certainly support that, but I think it's also important that we note that the needs of vulnerable people in many other aspects of our society are not being dealt with.

I would like to come back briefly; several people have mentioned the private member's bill that we brought forward, just before we broke for the summer, that would have established a select committee on developmental services, which would have brought the needs of people with developmental challenges and dual disabilities with respect to both mental health challenges and developmental services challenges, to talk about the many issues that they and their families are facing in terms of housing, in terms of education, in terms of inclusionary opportunities—in terms of having an opportunity to have a life instead of not finishing school at age 21 and ending up in your parents' basement watching TV or being on the computer.

It had been my hope—because all parties had agreed to this service and this committee being established—that we would have had the opportunity to sit during the summer and complete an interim report to be submitted to this Legislature by October 31. Unfortunately, the government did not see fit to strike this committee by the time we broke in June, so it is something that I have continued to hear about from many people, not just in my riding of Whitby-Oshawa but across the province; and my colleagues have reiterated the concerns that they've heard expressed to them. So it is something that I feel very strongly about; we are going to be bringing this forward again. We are going to continue to press the government until the select committee has been established because there are so many issues that need to be dealt with.

There are people who cannot speak for themselves and who are vulnerable, for whatever reason. That's our job:

to speak up for them in the Legislature, whether it's through their needs through disability services or the needs in the context of consumer protection, and that is something we certainly intend to follow up on in the weeks and months to come.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Ms. Soo Wong: I'm pleased to follow my colleague from Whitby-Oshawa in terms of this debate on Bill 55. I believe that this particular debate on Bill 55 is approaching 19 hours. I think it's prudent for this House to call the question and not to delay further conversation and debate on this issue. I'm encouraging members to do the right thing, because it is the right thing to support our consumers and every Ontarian across Ontario.

1620

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Jim McDonell: I appreciate the amount of time that has gone into this debate. It's interesting: Some of the rules are put in place to allow debate and to give members a chance to get up and talk about issues that they have in their riding, issues they'd like to see changed.

I know the member from Whitby-Oshawa brings up some very good points about the select committee on developmentally challenged residents, not only in her riding but across the province. I've had the opportunity to meet with a few groups at round tables over the years, and looking at setting up another one in October. This is a group that needs some protection, consumer protection, and just protection in general. They need our help, but this government has refused to put a select committee together that would look at some of the issues they face.

Of course, there are many issues as we go across this province, I think, that the people are wanting to see. We want to talk about some of the accountability issues. I'm sure that this has some consumer protection issues in it, but there's many more.

In my riding, the real estate agents have talked about the need—they know that there needs to be some credibility around, for instance, phantom offers. There are improvements that need to be made so that they're not tracking mounds of paper; for instance, making the package so that it's actually a one-page addendum that allows them—look for a workable solution.

I think we're looking for workable solutions that cut the cost of business, that allow the consumer to pay less for those services and that allow the consumer to have more money at the end of the day to spend on new products. That actually generates jobs.

Again, jobs are not something we're seeing in the Legislative Assembly agenda that's coming up. I think that's a key issue for the people in my riding of Stormont-Dundas-South Glengarry.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. John O'Toole: Out of respect for my colleague from Durham region, the member from Whitby-Oshawa,

I'm standing to compliment her on her informed remarks. She did mention that she was a lawyer and highly regarded in the region, dealing with, in many cases, consumer protections, as a lawyer is there to protect the legalities of transactions.

I think the two points she mentioned that show her streak of compassion are the issue of the cooling-off period—I think that's very important because of today's barrage of sales tactics and techniques. Consumers, especially seniors, potentially, or other vulnerable people, might feel compelled to comply with the pressure tactics of some of these vacuum salesmen of today. It could be a cellphone salesman, for that matter, but in modern technology—but also the real estate brokers act, to clarify certain sections, with her experience in that field.

I think the most important thing is that she tried to bring the discussion around consumer protection back to one of her passions. That passion is this call for the select committee on developmental services—a review. I did hear comments during the summer about that.

Really, the point she made so eloquently was the sensitivity of some individuals, the need to be protected and the role of government, not just in this context of this bill on consumer protection but the other types of entitlements or services that people should be entitled to. Those consumers need a voice like Christine Elliott to be standing up for them, to make sure that their needs are heard by the government and, indeed, by all of Ontario and, more importantly, understood in the context that she brings it forward.

I think this bill has had a significant amount of discussion and needs to move swiftly and momentarily to committee to correct some of the shortcomings of the bill itself that have been pointed out during these debates over the last few days.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): We have time for one last question or comment, if there is any.

Mr. Bill Walker: It's always a pleasure to offer comments on my esteemed colleague from Whitby-Oshawa. She has been an absolutely tireless champion for those from the mental health and special needs sectors, and she continues to do that. I think that she has been very eloquent again today in bringing this about with a very specific consumer protection area, that being we need a select committee for the developmental needs of others.

This is something that—more and more people in our communities are falling through the cracks. They're not getting the care they need, and it's something we all have to collectively address in this House.

As my colleague points out, over the last eight years, it has gotten worse, not better, and part of that is because of the waste and the scandals and the boondoggles. The money that something like the gas plant could have gone towards—it could have cleared up those wait-lists.

People in my riding are having two-and-a-half to four-year waiting lists to try to get those most vulnerable into some kind of care, some kind of service that will ease the burden. The family members that have been providing

that care are getting very elderly. They're coming to my office in tears. They don't know what they're going to do. They don't know who to turn to. They don't know what's going to happen to their children when something, unfortunately, will happen to them. It's something that absolutely should be a priority.

While I agree that we're standing in this House, debating this, for over 17 hours, the key is that we have to make sure we bring debate on behalf of our constituents. They need to know that they're sending us to Queen's Park with their messages, and these are the types of messages we need to—so although this debate was more about gas heaters and real estate, we've taken the opportunity to bring other things to the light of the government opposite, so that they will make sure they are addressing those and, hopefully, as they look at their agenda for the coming months and coming years, that they'll make sure that mental health and those with special needs are definitely at the highest priority.

Speaker, those more vulnerable, those that need help, are the reason all of us come to this place to make a better world for everybody, and every day that we're here, we will continue to do that. I will stand here proudly and bring those types of concerns to the House, to your attention, Speaker, and most importantly, to the government, who truly is responsible for setting the agenda and fixing these glaring gaps in service delivery for those less fortunate.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That concludes the time for questions and comments. We return to the member for Whitby–Oshawa for her reply.

Mrs. Christine Elliott: I'd like to thank my colleagues who have commented on my remarks: the members from Scarborough–Agincourt, Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry, Durham, and Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound.

To the member from Scarborough–Agincourt: I agree with you. We have had a lot of discussion on this bill. I think it is important, because it does deal with several different areas, but I think that we are getting to a resolution of this quickly, and I hope that we will have this in committee very soon. You're right: It is the right thing to do, and we should get on with it.

To my colleague from Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry: He talked about developing workable solutions to make sure that businesses can deal with this, to make sure that we retain this essential information but that we do it in a way that makes sense. Can we summarize it? What's the best way in order to do it so that we get the essential information contained and retained but that it

doesn't provide undue problems for those who are retaining those records?

The member from Durham talked about the importance of cooling-off periods. I think there is a preponderance of high-pressure sales going on in various different aspects of Ontario today, and we need to do whatever we can do to protect vulnerable people, particularly vulnerable seniors.

Finally, my colleague from Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound again talked about vulnerable people generally. Though this is only dealing with vulnerable people in the context of consumer protection, again, we need to turn our minds to the needs of other vulnerable people.

I think that there is some private members' business that's going to be coming up later this week, and the member from Oakville is going to be bringing forward a private member's bill to deal with psychological issues in the workplace. That's something that makes a whole lot of sense. I think that we should be protecting those people, but I would ask all of the government members to also reconsider the select committee on developmental disabilities. This is something where there are a huge number of needs in a huge number of areas. I ask you to reconsider it and support it.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Ms. MacCharles has moved second reading of Bill 55, An Act to amend the Collection Agencies Act, the Consumer Protection Act, 2002 and the Real Estate and Business Brokers Act, 2002 and to make consequential amendments to other Acts. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

I heard a no.

All those in favour of the motion will please say "aye."

All those opposed will please say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

Call in the members. This will be a 30-minute bell.

I wish to inform the House that I have received from the chief government whip a request to defer the vote until deferred votes tomorrow.

Second reading vote deferred.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Orders of the day.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: I move adjournment of the House.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Mr. Naqvi has moved the adjournment of the House. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

This House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 9 a.m.

The House adjourned at 1630.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO
ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

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Clerks-at-the-Table / Greffiers parlementaires: Todd Decker, Tonia Grannum, Trevor Day, Anne Stokes

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Armstrong, Teresa J. (NDP)	London–Fanshawe	
Arnott, Ted (PC)	Wellington–Halton Hills	First Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Premier vice-président du comité plénier de l'Assemblée
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Bartolucci, Rick (LIB)	Sudbury	
Berardinetti, Lorenzo (LIB)	Scarborough Southwest / Scarborough–Sud-Ouest	
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Campbell, Sarah (NDP)	Kenora–Rainy River	
Cansfield, Donna H. (LIB)	Etobicoke Centre / Etobicoke-Centre	
Chan, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (LIB)	Markham–Unionville	Minister of Tourism, Culture and Sport / Ministre du Tourisme, de la Culture et du Sport Minister Responsible for the 2015 Pan and Parapan American Games / Ministre responsable des Jeux panaméricains et parapanaméricains de 2015
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Clark, Steve (PC)	Leeds–Grenville	Deputy Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint de l'opposition officielle
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Coteau, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (LIB)	Don Valley East / Don Valley-Est	Minister of Citizenship and Immigration / Ministre des Affaires civiques et de l'Immigration
Crack, Grant (LIB)	Glengarry–Prescott–Russell	
Craitor, Kim (LIB)	Niagara Falls	
Damerla, Dipika (LIB)	Mississauga East–Cooksville / Mississauga-Est–Cooksville	
Del Duca, Steven (LIB)	Vaughan	
Delaney, Bob (LIB)	Mississauga–Streetsville	
Dhillon, Vic (LIB)	Brampton West / Brampton-Ouest	
Dickson, Joe (LIB)	Ajax–Pickering	
DiNovo, Cheri (NDP)	Parkdale–High Park	
Duguid, Hon. / L'hon. Brad (LIB)	Scarborough Centre / Scarborough-Centre	Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities / Ministre de la Formation et des Collèges et Universités
Dunlop, Garfield (PC)	Simcoe North / Simcoe-Nord	
Elliott, Christine (PC)	Whitby–Oshawa	Deputy Leader, Official Opposition / Chef adjointe de l'opposition officielle
Fedeli, Victor (PC)	Nipissing	
Fife, Catherine (NDP)	Kitchener–Waterloo	
Flynn, Kevin Daniel (LIB)	Oakville	
Forster, Cindy (NDP)	Welland	
Fraser, John (LIB)	Ottawa South / Ottawa-Sud	Deputy House Leader, Recognized Party / Leader parlementaire adjointe de parti reconnu
Gélinas, France (NDP)	Nickel Belt	

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Gerretsen, Hon. / L'hon. John (LIB)	Kingston and the Islands / Kingston et les îles	Attorney General / Procureur général
Gravelle, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (LIB)	Thunder Bay–Superior North / Thunder Bay–Superior-Nord	Minister of Northern Development and Mines / Ministre du Développement du Nord et des Mines
Hardeman, Ernie (PC)	Oxford	
Harris, Michael (PC)	Kitchener–Conestoga	
Hatfield, Percy (NDP)	Windsor–Tecumseh	
Hillier, Randy (PC)	Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington	
Holiday, Douglas C. (PC)	Etobicoke–Lakeshore	
Horwath, Andrea (NDP)	Hamilton Centre / Hamilton-Centre	
Hoskins, Hon. / L'hon. Eric (LIB)	St. Paul's	Leader, Recognized Party / Chef de parti reconnu Leader, New Democratic Party of Ontario / Chef du Nouveau parti démocratique de l'Ontario Minister of Economic Development, Trade and Employment / Ministre du Développement économique, du Commerce et de l'Emploi
Hudak, Tim (PC)	Niagara West–Glanbrook / Niagara-Ouest–Glanbrook	Leader, Official Opposition / Chef de l'opposition officielle Leader, Progressive Conservative Party of Ontario / Chef du Parti progressiste-conservateur de l'Ontario
Hunter, Mitzie Jacquelin (LIB)	Scarborough–Guildwood	
Jackson, Rod (PC)	Barrie	
Jaczek, Helena (LIB)	Oak Ridges–Markham	
Jeffrey, Hon. / L'hon. Linda (LIB)	Brampton–Springdale	Chair of Cabinet / Présidente du Conseil des ministres Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing / Ministre des Affaires municipales et du Logement
Jones, Sylvia (PC)	Dufferin–Caledon	
Klees, Frank (PC)	Newmarket–Aurora	
Kwinter, Monte (LIB)	York Centre / York-Centre	
Leal, Hon. / L'hon. Jeff (LIB)	Peterborough	Minister of Rural Affairs / Ministre des Affaires rurales
Leone, Rob (PC)	Cambridge	
Levac, Hon. / L'hon. Dave (LIB)	Brant	Speaker / Président de l'Assemblée législative Minister of Consumer Services / Ministre des Services aux consommateurs
MacCharles, Hon. / L'hon. Tracy (LIB)	Pickering–Scarborough East / Pickering–Scarborough-Est	
MacLaren, Jack (PC)	Carleton–Mississippi Mills	
MacLeod, Lisa (PC)	Nepean–Carleton	
Mangat, Amrit (LIB)	Mississauga–Brampton South / Mississauga–Brampton-Sud	
Mantha, Michael (NDP)	Algoma–Manitoulin	
Marchese, Rosario (NDP)	Trinity–Spadina	
Matthews, Hon. / L'hon. Deborah (LIB)	London North Centre / London-Centre-Nord	Deputy Premier / Vice-première ministre Minister of Health and Long-Term Care / Ministre de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée
Mauro, Bill (LIB)	Thunder Bay–Atikokan	
McDonell, Jim (PC)	Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry	
McKenna, Jane (PC)	Burlington	
McMeekin, Hon. / L'hon. Ted (LIB)	Ancaster–Dundas–Flamborough–Westdale	Minister of Community and Social Services / Ministre des Services sociaux et communautaires
McNaughton, Monte (PC)	Lambton–Kent–Middlesex	
McNeely, Phil (LIB)	Ottawa–Orléans	
Meilleur, Hon. / L'hon. Madeleine (LIB)	Ottawa–Vanier	
Miller, Norm (PC)	Parry Sound–Muskoka	
Miller, Paul (NDP)	Hamilton East–Stoney Creek / Hamilton-Est–Stoney Creek	Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services / Ministre de la Sécurité communautaire et des Services correctionnels Minister Responsible for Francophone Affairs / Ministre déléguée aux Affaires francophones
Milligan, Rob E. (PC)	Northumberland–Quinte West	
Milloy, Hon. / L'hon. John (LIB)	Kitchener Centre / Kitchener-Centre	Third Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Troisième vice-président du comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Moridi, Hon. / L'hon. Reza (LIB)	Richmond Hill	Minister of Government Services / Ministre des Services gouvernementaux Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire du gouvernement Minister of Research and Innovation / Ministre de la Recherche et de l'Innovation

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Munro, Julia (PC)	York-Simcoe	Second Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Deuxième vice-présidente du comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Murray, Hon. / L'hon. Glen R. (LIB)	Toronto Centre / Toronto-Centre	Minister of Infrastructure / Ministre de l'Infrastructure Minister of Transportation / Ministre des Transports Minister of Labour / Ministre du Travail
Naqvi, Hon. / L'hon. Yasir (LIB)	Ottawa Centre / Ottawa-Centre	
Natyshak, Taras (NDP)	Essex	
Nicholls, Rick (PC)	Chatham-Kent-Essex	
O'Toole, John (PC)	Durham	
Orazietti, Hon. / L'hon. David (LIB)	Sault Ste. Marie	Minister of Natural Resources / Ministre des Richesses naturelles
Ouellette, Jerry J. (PC)	Oshawa	
Pettapiece, Randy (PC)	Perth-Wellington	
Piruzza, Hon. / L'hon. Teresa (LIB)	Windsor West / Windsor-Ouest	Minister of Children and Youth Services / Ministre des Services à l'enfance et à la jeunesse Minister Responsible for Women's Issues / Ministre déléguée à la Condition féminine
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No. 55



Nº 55

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of Ontario

Second Session, 40th Parliament

Assemblée législative
de l'Ontario

Deuxième session, 40^e législature



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Tuesday 10 September 2013

Mardi 10 septembre 2013

Speaker
Honourable Dave Levac

Président
L'honorable Dave Levac

Clerk
Deborah Deller

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Tuesday 10 September 2013

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Mardi 10 septembre 2013

The House met at 0900.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Good morning. Please join me in prayer.

Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

WIRELESS SERVICES AGREEMENTS ACT, 2013

LOI DE 2013 SUR LES CONVENTIONS DE SERVICES SANS FIL

Ms. MacCharles moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 60, An Act to strengthen consumer protection with respect to consumer agreements relating to wireless services accessed from a cellular phone, smart phone or any other similar mobile device / Projet de loi 60, Loi visant à mieux protéger les consommateurs en ce qui concerne les conventions de consommation portant sur les services sans fil accessibles au moyen d'un téléphone cellulaire, d'un téléphone intelligent ou de tout autre appareil mobile semblable.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Ms. MacCharles has moved second reading of Bill 60. Ms. MacCharles.

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: I'm very pleased to rise to speak to this bill this morning. I'll be sharing my time later with the Honourable David Orazietti, the Minister of Natural Resources.

This act, the Wireless Services Agreements Act, 2013, is a critical step forward as we strengthen protections for consumers in an area that affects more than 80% of Ontario's population.

I will begin by setting the groundwork for how far we've come in protecting consumers and the families of Ontario in the area of consumer protection. Last spring, our government introduced the Stronger Protection for Ontario Consumers Act, 2013. This bill is before the House and I'm pleased that it seems to be moving forward. In fact, I think we're having a deferred vote on it later this morning. The introduction of Bill 55 met a commitment made by our government's speech from the throne, a commitment about strengthening the rights of Ontario consumers and working to ensure a fair, safe and transparent marketplace.

When introducing the Stronger Protection for Ontario Consumers Act, I outlined how it proposes to address four very important areas of consumer protection. Just to

recap briefly, the bill would, first, curb aggressive high-pressure door-to-door sales tactics, especially for the sale or rental of water heaters. Secondly, it will protect vulnerable indebted consumers against misleading and abusive practices of some companies that offer debt settlement services. Third, it will provide stronger safeguards to strengthen the integrity of real estate multiple-offer practices and, fourth, give home sellers more power to negotiate flexible lower-cost arrangements when using a real estate professional. This package of consumer protection reforms addresses some key areas of Ontario's marketplace and would make the marketplace fairer, provide more choice to the people of this great province and boost consumer confidence.

Since that announcement, we've moved forward on several initiatives in this area, and we're eager to achieve the passage of the legislation to begin improving protections for Ontario consumers and to move that as quickly as possible, Speaker. But our efforts to improve consumer protection for Ontario consumers have not stopped there.

Less than two weeks after announcing the wide-ranging legislation I've just outlined, I introduced legislation to protect the rights of Ontario consumers in one more very significant sector of the marketplace: cellphones and wireless service agreements. Today, I'm leading off second reading debate on this important piece of legislation.

People in Ontario want and deserve clarity in their agreements with wireless companies. In the same spirit of clarity, we want to be clear about the protections for Ontario consumers that they would get from our proposed Wireless Services Agreements Act. We are talking about clear cellphone contracts, Speaker. We want consumers to have a clear understanding of what a cellphone contract will cost. We want wireless providers to be clear about the services their customers have signed up for. We want consumers to have a clear understanding of their rights when it comes to renewing their existing contracts, and we want consumers to know their rights when a service provider does not follow the rules. So we are being clear about the tools available to enforce the rules.

The use of cellphones and wireless communications is pervasive in the province. How pervasive? Consider the fact that over 80% of Ontario's population uses these devices for texting, talking, playing games, making plans, watching videos or sending emails. For many, they provide the comfort that a call can be made quickly in the case of an emergency.

Many of us are also responsible for paying for these cellphones and wireless devices. No doubt parents in this province pay for the cellphone contracts for many children. I know in my household, my husband and I have the responsibility of looking after cellphone bills for our two teenagers. That responsibility is highlighted at this time of year with the start of school. Many parents enter into cellphone or wireless service contracts, or people change their cellphone contracts as children head off to school—that could be middle school, secondary school, university or college—because moms and dads and caregivers recognize they want the security of knowing that they can call quickly and check in with their kids very easily.

I know in my family, it has become a way of life. I don't think there are too many of my children's friends who do not have some sort of wireless device for communication to stay in touch with parents and, of course, their friends, which sometimes is more important to them, I guess.

Just two weeks ago, my ministry offered some tips to consumers about how to protect their hard-earned money when entering into cellphone contracts in anticipation of the new school year. We received excellent coverage in the media to help spread the message.

In addition to cellphone contracts for our children, many of us are helping our aging parents with their cellphone contracts and bills, and we may be paying for those services.

We can see right here in the Legislature, Speaker, how many MPPs rely on these wireless devices. Some of us have one cellphone, some of us have two, and some of us have three cellphones, between our government-issued ones, our personal ones—

Ms. Sylvia Jones: We have too many.

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: One of the members opposite said we have too many cellphones.

Some people are consolidating different cellphone accounts into one or more different types of devices. I think we can see right here in the Ontario Legislature how dependent we are on this kind of technology to do our jobs.

0910

Regardless of one's age, regardless of one's occupation, people seem to love these devices and services. What they don't love, however, are the surprises: the contract confusion and sometimes poor customer service. Just consider the results of a report released earlier in March of this year by the advocacy group called OpenMedia.ca. In an OpenMedia.ca survey, almost 3,000 cellphone users shared their views on their relationship with their cellphone provider. According to the report, entitled Time for an Upgrade: Demanding Choice in Canada's Cell Phone Market, a majority of Canadian respondents reported "being forced into accepting poor—often disrespectful—service." The study encouraged policy-makers to insist, among other things, that providers provide fair contracts along with transparency and service offerings, pricing and bundled services.

Consider another perspective on the level of customer service in the cellphone market. Earlier this year, the federal Commissioner for Complaints for Telecommunications Services noted a 250% rise in complaints over the past four years, with wireless sector complaints accounting for more and more of the commissioner's workload.

And while the Open Media study and the complaints commissioner's report are both national in scope, they shed light on many of the consumer concerns that have come to light in Ontario's cellphone market. In our province, people are entering into contracts thinking they've understood what they're paying for, only to gaze at their bill every month—and they do that with some confusion, Speaker. The bottom line is that many Ontario cellphone and wireless services consumers do not properly understand what they're paying for. They do not have a clear understanding of what the contract states because their contracts are confusing and unclear. We've heard that repeatedly, and we aim to change that. I know sometimes there's just too much information on a cellphone contract, so it's hard for consumers to read the most important parts of what they've signed up for in such a contract.

Ontario consumers deserve easy-to-understand cellphone contracts with no hidden costs. Only on that basis can they shop around to find the services that suit their needs best at the lowest cost. Only when consumers fully understand what they are agreeing to in their cellphone and wireless services contracts can they comparison shop and make an informed decision about the type of service or service bundles they want, and at a price they agree to. Only when our marketplace supports open, fair and transparent pricing will consumers truly be able to shop for the best deal on their cellphones and wireless services.

Our proposed legislation would help to ensure that when Ontario's consumers enter into a cellphone and wireless services contract, they are indeed fully informed. The legislation would, if passed, ensure that consumers have a number of protections: first, clear, written contracts that spell out which services come with the basic fee and which services result in extra charges. Second, it would include the right to be asked if they agree or consent to the renewal of their fixed-term agreement. Third, it would include the ability to walk away from their contracts at any time with limits on cancellation fees. Next, it would include the right to sue the supplier for three times the amount of that that is owed to the consumer, if the consumer is owed a refund and the company is refusing to pay. Finally, it would include the benefits of all-inclusive price advertising.

Consumers would receive one contract that spells out clearly the terms and costs they've agreed to, and companies would have to provide clear information on such things as roaming costs and when those costs would be incurred. Companies would need to inform consumers whether a cellphone is locked and how long it will remain locked. Suppliers would have to disclose the details of a manufacturer's warranty on a phone if the consumer is purchasing supplementary warranty coverage.

Since we announced these proposed stronger protections, many people have asked me why the government is reintroducing this legislation similar to the cellphone bill that was introduced during the last session in 2012. The answer's very simple: This was important to consumers last year and it remains important legislation this year. That's, I think, evident by what we've seen in the media and the pickup and the responses many of us have received as MPPs in support of this legislation.

I want to briefly outline the effect of the changes that are reflected in our current bill. These changes would prohibit service providers from charging consumers for calls made once a phone is reported lost or stolen. Unfortunately, that does happen. I certainly see that with my kids. They've lost control of their cellphones from time to time. Sometimes I have to impose some consequences around that, but it would be great if we had that provision that prohibits the providers from charging consumers for calls made once it's reported lost or stolen. Hopefully it's lost and it gets retrieved, and it's not stolen.

Next, the changes would allow the consumers to agree upfront to monthly extensions at the end of a fixed-term contract to avoid loss of their cellphone number.

Finally, they would provide authority for regulations to require service providers to give consumers a personalized contract summary.

We introduced our bill with these changes because we believe there is a role for the province to play. We wanted to bring this legislation forward to protect Ontarians and because we believe consumers need this protection and the strong enforcement measures and enhanced remedies that are outlined in the bill. That is something we did not see when the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission, also known as the CRTC, announced its new national wireless code on June 3 of this year. That code, which strengthens consumer protection for cellphone users, will come into force in December of this year for all new contracts entered into on or after that date. It will also apply to contracts that are entered into, amended, renewed or extended on or after December 2. That implementation may be in doubt, however, as several carriers have challenged the CRTC code in court. This kind of uncertainty makes it even more important for our legislation provincially to be acted on quickly to protect consumers. We are pleased that the CRTC code takes important steps in protecting consumers in this province, and in fact across the country. The code does address some issues, for example, such as prepaid phone cards and unlocking of devices. Those are the kinds of provisions that are best suited to federal jurisdiction as opposed to provincial jurisdiction.

I want to be very clear that the province has responsibility for making sure consumer contracts are fair and transparent, and they are necessary protections that are in place for our consumers. We certainly wouldn't be the first province to implement this kind of legislation.

Our legislation addresses two areas in particular that are not dealt with by the national code. They are all-inclusive price advertising as well as restrictions on

unilateral contract amendments. Our proposed legislation would also give consumers the benefit of comprehensive Ministry of Consumer Services enforcement tools to deal with wireless providers who break the rules, unlike the CRTC approach, which is more of an individual complaint enforcement approach.

We must continue to press forward to ensure our consumers are protected. Ontario's marketplace is dominated by the big three wireless companies. As we know, there was recent speculation and media reports that Verizon might be entering the Canadian marketplace. Verizon's ultimate decision not to actually reinforces the dominance of what's happening in this marketplace, and it shows that that is probably not changing. In this environment in particular, strong consumer protections become even more important. It's also worth noting that the CRTC itself, when consulting on their draft code, was of the view that a national code could coexist with provincial legislation. So we knew that before we introduced our bill, and that premise, I understand, still exists. So we're pressing forward here in Ontario.

In a few moments my colleague will be speaking to this bill; he is the Honourable David Orazietti. I do want to thank him publicly for the work he has done in supporting consumers in Ontario. In fact, it was David Orazietti who brought forward earlier versions of this bill and was a tireless advocate for changing the way we protect consumers who are customers of wireless service products.

0920

Our proposed legislation, if passed, would have very strong enforcement measures and remedies for consumers when their rights have been breached. As I mentioned, these cellphone and wireless service remedies and protections are part of a broader initiative in consumer protection initiatives in Ontario. We're calling it our Ontario consumer package.

We believe our comprehensive approach will strengthen consumer protection and ensure a fair, safe and informed marketplace in Ontario. We have a responsibility to Ontario consumers, and to their families, to ensure that the millions of cellphone agreements signed by Ontario individuals and families each and every year are comprehensive and easy to understand.

This clarity is all about helping people of Ontario to make very confident decisions in the marketplace. We want Ontarians to make informed choices, spend wisely and protect their hard-earned money. I think we can all agree that when we have confident consumers, we help build a stronger Ontario economy. A stronger Ontario economy is something everyone in this province can absolutely support.

I'd like to thank you, Ms. Speaker, for allowing me to speak to this bill. At this point, I'd like to give the floor to my colleague the Honourable Minister of Natural Resources, David Orazietti. And I'll just bridge until he arrives.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The minister may continue.

Hon. David Orazietti: Thank you, Speaker. It's a pleasure to be here today and a pleasure to speak to Bill 60. I want to commend Minister MacCharles for her leadership on this bill, a bill that's incredibly important to Ontarians.

You've heard much about the changes that are necessary to protect consumers from charges and contracts that are unfair and one-sided. I want to continue today on that theme and also to elaborate specifically on some of these changes that would benefit consumers. We certainly welcome support from all sides of the House on this and all parties and certainly hope that they will be unequivocal in their support.

The challenges that consumers have faced—and I go back a number of years ago, when I introduced Bill 133 as a private member's bill and also Bill 5 as a private member's bill on this same issue. What we determined in the research and work that we had done at the time was that—for example, a study that was done in 2010 by the New America Foundation determined that out of 11 countries surveyed with respect to cellphone charges, when you look at the three components of your cellphone bill—your voice, your data and your texting in your cellphone—Canada had the highest costs to consumers, significantly higher than a number of other jurisdictions.

That led us to believe that contractual agreements that are signed in the province of Ontario that are clearly the jurisdiction of provincial governments are fair game for provincial legislation to protect consumers. I think that part of the issue stems from the fact that we all recognize that there is a bit of a vacuum at the federal level when it comes to this issue. The CRTC has not issued spectrum licences in a way that would allow adequate competition to take place. We have very limited competition in this country: essentially three large companies controlling 95% of the market share.

We have other brands of cellphones or contracts that individuals can sign. It creates the optics that there are all kinds of choice in the marketplace for the consumer, but the reality isn't, because when you pick up the phone and you call the customer service contact centre of one of these other companies, you're really talking to a customer centre run by one of the big three. That puts consumers at a disadvantage.

There is no reason that the contracts that have been shaped the way they've been for a number of years with the requirements and the onuses that are put on consumers—they're not reasonable. They're excessive. Most consumers understand that the practices have been unhelpful to consumers—lacking choice and punitive in many ways, when you look at some of these cancellation fees that are absolutely horrendous. What kind of environment are we in?

We're here because this issue is important to Ontarians and we're here to speak to it because at the federal level there is not the protection for consumers that there needs to be. There has not been the issuing of spectrum for licencing with respect to cellphone companies that there needs to be to allow new entrants into the market-

place to compete, to bring prices down, to make prices more cost-competitive with other jurisdictions. So Canadians and Ontarians go on and on and on paying these excessive charges.

In 2010, when I introduced this private member's bill, Bill 133, the only province that had consumer protection legislation in place for wireless devices was the province of Quebec, and it had just been passed in June 2010. Following that, Manitoba introduced and passed legislation. Following that, Newfoundland and Labrador introduced and passed legislation. So there are three other provinces in this country that obviously felt the federal government was leaving them in the lurch, so to speak, and consumers in their province needed greater protection. We've seen much conversation around this issue in recent years, as residents in this country look for ways in which their senior levels of government will step up, provide the leadership that's needed and protect them from the practices of large companies.

We talk about competition issues. We all want to see competition and a better price for consumers. What's really at stake for these companies is corporate profits. That's what's at stake. This is important, that we ensure that from our perspective there are fair and balanced contracts. It's something that I think we can all understand when it comes to the language in the contracts, for example, where the surveys that have been done with consumers indicate that more than half of consumers don't understand their contracts. They're very onerous; they're written with legal complexities to them that the average consumer struggles with. So we want to see the contracts in plain language, in simple terms for consumers to understand what is being asked of them.

We also want to see full disclosure of goods and services, various charges that may be incurred, start-up fees and other costs so consumers are certain; there's not bill shock; they're not going to get their first bill after they go to that cellphone store, purchase and sign up, they get home, another month goes by, the bill comes in and they say, "Wait a second. I didn't think it was going to be \$150 for this phone; I thought it was going to be \$49.99, like the ad said." So all-in pricing, all-inclusive pricing in the marketplace today—and you see this across all kinds of services, and why it's important. That's something we need to be bringing to this sector.

Consent is important with respect to this. We spoke to many consumers over the years on this issue, those who would indicate that they called the company up, they wanted to make a small change to the plan, they were within a few months of their plan expiring because they entered a three-year contract and they changed jobs or they wanted to add a feature like conference calling or call display, some kind of feature; and all of a sudden they find themselves locked into another three-year term from that point on, which cancelling would be incredibly expensive. These types of tactics are not helpful for consumers. They're obviously driven by maximizing profits and extracting the most that they can from the consumer once they get them hooked: "Let's see how much we can

get out of this consumer,” and they go about doing that as best they can. I think that’s why it’s important to ensure that we have the consent piece as part of this legislation.

Cancelling agreements at any time with caps on cancellation fees: This was obviously an issue that many consumers raised, and the ministry has received countless complaints on this subject as a whole, but on this issue specifically with regard to cancellation fees. So I’m certainly pleased to see that the minister has this in here, this \$50 maximum cancellation cap. I’ve heard horror stories of individuals paying \$400 and \$500 to get out of a contract for services that they’re no longer going to need.

Prohibiting charging for services that cannot be accessed when a warranted phone is in for repairs—you don’t have your phone; you don’t have access to it; the company can’t keep billing you, as has been the practice in the past—and protection against billing when the phone is lost or stolen—I heard the minister allude to that earlier, and I think she makes an incredibly important point.

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With respect to the bill specifically, I think there are some fantastic protections here for consumers that are included, and I think this is something that we need to move forward with, quickly and expeditiously. Consumers have waited long enough for this type of protection to come about. As I’ve indicated, it has been passed in other provinces as long as three years ago, and yet we still have a challenge federally to see any real, tangible action on this.

When the CWTA, the Canadian Wireless Telecommunications Association, speaks about this issue—they have their voluntary code of conduct. That’s what they have. That’s what is supposed to protect consumers: the Canadian Wireless Telecommunications Association’s voluntary code of conduct. Well, folks, that’s just not good enough for consumers. It doesn’t cut it. The contracts continue to look the way they are, and consumers continue to be gouged by these large companies, so it doesn’t make sense. We obviously need to take more significant steps to protect consumers.

Would we prefer to see a universal code right across the country that creates consistency and fairness for consumers from coast to coast to coast? Yes, of course we would. But failing that, and in this absence of leadership at the federal level when it comes to this issue, we’re prepared to step up.

Again, I commend the minister for her leadership on this. She sees this as an important issue, as does our government, and we want to be protecting consumers on this issue.

Certainly, the message to the CWTA is they need to take it to another level when it comes to the protection of consumers. This voluntary code of conduct, that sees consumers disadvantaged by these contracts, is unacceptable, and that’s the message that is coming from the public. That’s the message that is coming from our government and from other governments across the country.

As far as the CRTC is concerned, they obviously play an important role in the licensing and oversight of telecommunications in this country. What I would say is that they have limited the ability for competition to thrive. They have not released the licensing spectrum that is needed to create competition. The fearmongering that is going on at the federal level about the instability and creating more of a cumbersome type of contract is completely smoke and mirrors.

That’s one of the lines that the CWTA uses: “Any type of legislation that’s passed by provinces is going to be too difficult for us to manage.” The way that they view this is that these costs will be passed on to consumers. It’s a bit of a threat, and we hear that in the language that they use about jurisdictions in this country that they feel should not be stepping into this environment, should just sort of stand down until the federal government—until they work with them to determine what’s desirable. If they don’t do that, and the provinces decide to step up and they decide to pass legislation, well, then, who knows what could happen to consumers? You could just end up driving up those bills up even further. That’s the kind of approach that the CWTA has taken. It’s unfair; it’s unfounded. It’s unrealistic that consumers should be required to continue to accept that type of approach.

The CRTC needs to move more quickly. They need to open up spectrum. They need to create some opportunities for competition.

We understand, obviously, that the CWTA membership is a powerful lobby group. Bell, Rogers and Telus are powerful players in this sector that monopolize the environment, and they create the playing field that is to their advantage.

As legislators here at Queen’s Park, it’s our obligation to make sure that we balance both the interests of the consumer and business to ensure that business can thrive, business can do well and business can turn a profit. We want to see jobs here in the country. But also, when we look at other jurisdictions and look at the comparison costs of other jurisdictions and what consumers are paying in those jurisdictions for cellphone costs—for voice, data and text, the components that make up your bill—it’s ridiculous. It is ridiculous in this province and in this country what we pay—what the costs should be. So that’s the reason, Speaker, why we’re here today supporting Bill 60.

I think that the consumer advocates that are out there who have made comments publicly around this issue—it speaks volumes. If you take a look at comments by the Public Interest Advocacy Centre, a report by Michael Janigan highlights the practice of extra charges in the Canadian telecommunications industry, whereby suppliers of consumer product and services segregate part of their costs as a separate charge and then add them to the final price paid by consumer. He speaks to the way in which these costs are manipulated. He describes these system access fees levied by the phone companies as “charges concocted by the wireless companies to appear as a government ... fee.” You have various individuals

who have come out and expressed their concern around this.

With respect to the bill, PIAC says that the “bill will help remove barriers to real competition for ordinary consumers of wireless services. It will help level the playing field for customers who ... feel trapped by onerous one-sided conditions.”

Mel Fruitman, who’s the vice president of the Consumers’ Association of Canada—here’s what he said: “For a long time consumers have been victims of the nefarious marketing practices of wireless telephone companies. This protection for consumers is necessary and long overdue. We can see no reason why this act would not receive all-party support and be quickly passed.”

Don Mercer, who is president of the Consumers Council of Canada—here’s what he said: “Contracts for cellular voice and data services and equipment rate as top-10 sources of consumer complaints in Ontario. Many consumers feel their rights are unfairly limited and find it hard to understand their responsibilities under these agreements. Now this bill in Ontario proposes action as well. Provinces across Canada should take responsibility and prompt action, and ultimately work toward a nationally harmonized approach that recognizes today’s consumers are highly mobile. The Consumers Council of Canada encourages members of the Ontario Legislature to seriously engage this bill as a practical measure.” There are all kinds of organizations that monitor practices of various companies and how they impact consumers in their daily lives, and clearly there’s consensus on this issue.

We received countless emails from individuals right across the province in our office, talking about, “It’s about time.” The flavour of the emails was that it’s about time that a government in this province stood up for consumers on wireless services and telecommunications and protected them from these contracts that are so one-sided and encouraged the federal government to create a national code that reflects what are really the true costs of delivering these services. “Stop the gouging.”

In my constituency office in Sault Ste. Marie, I’ve sat down with a host of individuals and residents in our community who have brought me examples of their cellphone contracts and their bills. They can’t understand the charges and can’t understand why they’re so significant. I’m not talking about the responsibility of an individual to know what their bill says and what they’ve agreed to and to pay in good faith that bill and be responsible. No one is excusing consumers or individuals from simply saying, “I’m going to go and I’m going to sign up for a \$500 phone, and I’m going to take that with me and I’m going to get it subsidized so I’m going to pay \$99 when I walk out the door, and two months later, I’m going to cancel my contract, and I should just be able to keep the phone.” That’s not what we’re talking about. There’s a formula in the bill for reducing and prorating that cost, what the individual would have to pay, what they would be obligated to.

We’re not talking about individuals taking advantage of companies, but when you have such a broad range—

and when you’re talking about Ontarians, 80% of Ontarians have some form of mobile device that they’re using. This is a daily feature for people. It has become much more essential than it was five or 10 years ago. This is important to the daily lives of Ontarians. We want to see contracts worded in such a way that individuals in this province can understand them, that they don’t need to go and get legal counsel to determine what their contract says. That’s not the way this should work.

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So, we’re slowly getting there. We’re slowly getting there. Some of these companies are starting to recognize that they can no longer take this approach: “Now, we’ll unlock your phone but it’ll cost you \$50.” You know, in some jurisdictions you can’t sell phones that are lost, as an example. There are all kinds of ways in which they can improve consumer relations that they have with customers, certainly in this province and nationally. But I think the responsibility, ultimately, with respect to the CRTC, is just greater responsibility at the federal government level and greater recognition that this is a challenge that consumers are facing.

Why should individual provinces need to debate this type of legislation at each and every—you know, at 10 legislatures across the country, and three territories—to try to provide better support for consumers, fair and balanced contracts, when one government, if they actually showed the leadership and had the guts to do something about it, would say, “This is not right. We’re going to allow more competition here. We’re going to effect change that would help to reduce cost to consumers and put these costs more in line with other jurisdictions”? Why wouldn’t they do that?

Obviously, it’s clear that they’re turning a blind eye to the issue. There are some small changes where we’re waiting for a new code to come out from the CRTC; that’s expected, I understand, in December. We’re going to be monitoring that. I know the minister is very interested to see how that lines up with our proposed legislation. I’ve heard companies that have said to me, “Look, you don’t need to do this. You don’t need to put these changes in place through legislation because we’re going to make these changes. We’re going to do all this. We’re going to help to protect consumers.” So I said, “Well okay, if you are going to do that, then you won’t mind if we pass our legislation because obviously we’re going to be on the same page.” “Well, that’s not what we are saying. That’s not what we’re saying.”

So, right away we get the backpedaling and we get, “Well, you know, just let us make the changes”—right? So that’s not acceptable. We can’t just sit here idly by while consumers are gouged in their contracts and these companies operate indiscriminately in their practices.

As I said, we’ve seen some small steps toward improvements. We have got a long way to go, they’ve got a long way to go, the CRTC has got a long way to go, and this voluntary code with the Wireless Telecom Association is pretty weak and unhelpful to consumers.

I just want to say on behalf of our government, our party completely supports this legislation. I want to

encourage all members of the Legislature to support it. Let's get this bill done and passed and out there working to help support consumers. We've been talking about this for a number of years.

I want to acknowledge the opposition members. When I introduced Bill 133 and Bill 5 and I think now Bill 60, the minister's bill or the government bill, opposition members have stood up and supported this legislation because they know; they're hearing from consumers as well and they understand that this is an issue that is not a partisan issue at all. This is an issue affecting consumers, across 13.5 million people in Ontario, 80% roughly of which have some type of device. I appreciate that you recognize that this is very important to everyone, and that your constituents in your ridings want to see you stand up and support this bill and get this passed as well so that we can support consumers.

With that, Speaker, I just want to say thank you for the opportunity to speak to this today, and I again commend the minister and her ministry for their leadership on this issue.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Questions and comments? The member for Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry.

Mr. Jim McDonell: Thank you, Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to comment on this bill. I guess it has been a long time coming. We've heard that it was first introduced in 2010. The party on this side agreed with it and supported moving ahead on it. But now we're wondering—even when it was introduced last spring, we were again for it but questioning, with the federal regulation coming out, the need for it and the opportunity for really confusing regulations. Now we see those regulations come out. Really, in many ways, this bill doesn't go as far as the wireless code that was put out by the federal government. I look down and we look at some of the issues: the cooling-off period is greater in the federal bill; there is no extra charge on unlimited services—not dealt with here, as it is by the CRTC. There are a number of things like that. So really, it looks like the bill has not been updated. Of course, it was issued before. But now we're looking at legislation that's coming about on December 1.

I somewhat wonder, is this the most important legislation we have to deal with here? We have issues with jobs; we have issues with the economy. People in my riding are calling up every day wondering and worried about what they're going to do this winter with their hydro and heating bills because they know, after last year, that they had a hard time deciding what they're going to pay: their grocery bills or these mandatory bills that are going to keep them in their houses. We certainly supported this for years, but it's been years since this government first talked about putting this through. With a majority government it certainly could have been put through very quickly.

Anyway, we're pleased to see this come through. We want to bring it to committee. We're worried about some of the conflicting regulations. Maybe it's more confusing than to go with one. We look forward to debate on this.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The member from Algoma–Manitoulin.

Mr. Michael Mantha: I rose here back on October 6, 2011, and gave my maiden speech. In that speech, I said I'm going to give credit where credit is due. I will maintain that and I've done that repeatedly in this House. I want to credit the member from Sault Ste. Marie for bringing this bill forward and his tenacity to reintroduce it over the few years he has been here.

It's an important bill because it hits households. It's all about affordability, and that's a lot of what the NDP has been very diligent about, as far as pushing issues forward: making life more affordable. Absolutely, we need to do the same thing with hydro; and absolutely, we need to do the same thing with creating jobs; and absolutely, we need to do things with making this government more accountable; and absolutely, we need to do a lot of other things, but this is one of those steps that is a small step forward. He's absolutely right, when the minister made his comments—and I'm glad to have him here today. We actually made an announcement over the course of the summer—again, in White River we worked together on this, and I'm looking forward to working with you on this one. This is a measure that is absolutely needed in northern Ontario.

You need to understand something: In northern Ontario, these cellphones are becoming more of a necessity than anything else, particularly for our kids, because mom and dad are working and the line of communication is that cellphone. Those kids have that cellphone, and there are lots of surprise things that come when kids decide to press buttons without thinking about what the effect of pressing that button on the phone is.

There are a few things that I look forward to when we're talking about this in committee which aren't highlighted in this bill. The current contracts: What are we going to do about those? Also, the roaming fees. I understand and I agree with the minister that a lot of the responsibility for regulating cellphones falls with the CRTC, but it's a step forward that we take that initiative to do it.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further comments?

Mr. John Fraser: I'm proud to stand in support of Bill 60. The act provides for clarity and transparency in wireless contracts. It provides for fair business practices. A wireless contract is very often the first contract a young person enters into. They're vulnerable, and their families are vulnerable. This act provides for some protection.

This past summer I had the benefit and the pleasure of knocking on a lot of doors, and the message that I received when I was knocking on those doors was, "I want you to work on those things that are important to me." I think this is one of those things. I think this is one of the issues that we can all agree on, that we can all work together on, and I urge all members of the Legislature to work towards passage of this bill so we can achieve this for the people who elected us.

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The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further comments?

Mr. Todd Smith: It's a pleasure to stand here today and bring comments on Bill 60. I would take exception to some of the comments that have been made here. I can tell you that having gone door to door over the summer in Ottawa South and having gone door to door in Scarborough—Guildwood and, of course, spending time in Prince Edward—Hastings, the number of times I heard from a constituent who said that we need wireless telecommunication legislation came up a total of zero.

Especially now—and we have supported it; the Minister of Natural Resources is correct. The opposition has supported previous legislation on numerous occasions, and I give him credit for bringing it forward three or four years ago when he did in a private member's bill, because there wasn't federal legislation coming at the time. But now we have the CRTC working on a wireless code, and it's going to be in place on December 1; they're bringing the recommendations forward on December 1.

So I just wonder about the relevancy of this type of legislation now and, to be honest, I wonder about the relevancy of a lot of the bills that we're debating in the Legislature today. You know, the tanning bed bill is important; no question it's important. The Local Food Act: There are important aspects of that as well. Co-op housing—all of these bills are wonderful bills. Water heater sales: Yes, we want to crack down on these types of things. But what I heard about when I went door to door in Ottawa South and in Scarborough—Guildwood and in my own riding of Prince Edward—Hastings—the constituents there are phoning by the dozens daily talking about the rising cost of electricity. They're worried about being able to stay in their homes, and we're not doing anything about that, Madam Speaker. There's no legislation coming from the government on how we're going to deal with the rising cost of electricity, how we're going to allow people to stay in their homes. While it's going to be 34 degrees and 44 with the humidex today in Toronto, in a couple of months from now, it's going to be a heck of a lot colder than that, and how people are going to be able to survive, I don't—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Thank you. The minister has two minutes to respond.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Order. Excuse me. Order.

The minister has two minutes to respond.

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: Thank you, Speaker. I'm very encouraged to hear, I think, all-party support for this bill moving forward, as they've done in the past. I'm a little bit concerned, though, that the PC comments tend to suggest that our bill should be watered down. We think the exact opposite, Speaker. We think the exact opposite because we want to strengthen protection for consumers.

I said it before and I'll say it again: The national code, if it was perfect, sure, we'd go for it. However, it isn't. It's an individual-complaint, voluntary kind of code. Our proposed bill is much stronger for protecting Ontarians. It deals with strong enforcement. It deals with all-in-

pricing, clear pricing. At the end of the day, like other provinces, we need to go forward with strong protection for consumers in Ontario, in the absence of anything federal that is robust enough for people in this province.

Having said that, when the code evolves—we're monitoring it closely, and we certainly don't want any duplication or confusion. That's not in the interests of Ontarians; it's not in the interests of consumers.

I do want to thank the contributions and the comments by the members from Ottawa South, Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry, Algoma—Manitoulin and last, but not least, the Minister of Natural Resources, the MPP for Sault Ste. Marie, who has been a tireless advocate for seeing this kind of protection go forward. We want to stand up for Ontarians. We want to have clear contracts. We want to have clear pricing. We want to make sure that the 80% of Ontarians who have wireless devices have good support. They have to have clear contracts. We have to have clear enforcement and strong enforcement for Ontarians, and I hope this bill will move forward.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further debate?

Mr. Jim McDonell: I rise today to begin the leadoff for our response to the wireless bill. As I said before, I commend the minister who started this bill some time ago. I think at that time we agreed, as did all three parties in here, that it was time to move ahead with that bill. The government at that time decided not to. I believe the bill has been introduced three more times, and now we're seeing, after federal legislation was put through, an urgency to move ahead with it.

In many cases—actually, in most cases—the federal legislation actually goes further. We really question now the dual legislation and why we're going through it. In some ways, it's even more confusing. Many other provinces have moved ahead. Ontario decided—the Liberal government decided—not to do that at the time. The persistence of the member over there brought it up a number of times.

We saw that there was a true need for this; we agreed with it. We did offer some comments on it. We're glad to see that they allowed for the extension of the contract, something that we thought was really a negative—to lose your cellphone number after your contract expired. So, certainly, they moved ahead on that.

But we need to look at some broader issues that this bill hasn't talked about. I heard the comment about the spectrum. With the big three, it's interesting, because throughout the debate at the federal level, I didn't hear anything from this government that talked about the need to move ahead with the cell spectrum. As I say, 95% of it is owned by the big three. This was an opportunity to move ahead and get some other players. Granted, there was some fear that a large US supplier would come in here, but really, 95% of the market today is controlled by three companies. That doesn't sponsor competition. It's a problem. At one time, we saw that prices in Canada were some of the highest in the world. A recent study shows

that that's no longer the case. We're actually lower than most states and most provinces. That has been taken care of; I guess the threat of competition has moved that down.

Certainly, we need to do more. I don't see anything in this bill that does that. Nothing in this bill talks about the spectrum issue or talks about the competition issue. So certainly they could have gone much further.

I don't see anything in this bill that encourages rural coverage. Being from a rural area—well, you don't even have to be that rural. You can drive down the 401 and you're constantly being dropped. Service is great in the big centres. We don't see anything that has done that. I live three or four miles north of the 401: very poor service. Our township is very poorly serviced. I look at this as a missed opportunity by this government.

We are a township that benefited from the high-speed Internet program that they had a number of years ago. This government was slow to accept new technologies that came around. Today's highest and best data plans are superior to what they're rolling out for high-speed Internet in the rural areas—by far.

You also have to look at the issue of the wireless Internet that's being rolled out. Because they wouldn't allow cell companies to enter that market, it's much slower. We're looking at one-megabyte services. Current data services are approaching 20 megabytes—not even close.

I don't know what happens in four or five years, when this service is no longer viable and equipment can't be bought. Who is going to go back and replace this? This was an expensive program they brought through.

Granted, when the program started, there was a need for it. I remember speaking to the ministry. We were one of the first townships that progressed with this. I acknowledge that it was too late for our township, but in eastern Ontario, all the other counties were waiting to move ahead. The feedback was, "We can't be supporting cell companies." You look at the other side of it. What they've done is they've encouraged an obsolete technology. Equipment that was out of date was being removed from earlier installations to be moved over.

So really all we've done is we've put in an obsolete service for something that, with competition, could have been opened up. There were at least three companies—and probably more of the small companies would have moved in, because there was a plan for government help in this program—that would have put in something that would have, of course, been the latest technology, which would be much faster. It would have had an action plan to be updated when it needed to be. I mean, I'm really worried about this equipment that's out of date now.

1000

I'll go back to how in our township, where we moved ahead with the wireless service, we extended a number of towers. It's a population of about 13,000 people. The last I heard, the company had 19 customers—try to maintain something. The problem with it was that there was enough cell service when the new cell companies came through that it made it redundant. We were lucky because

we had enough service with some towns that people didn't go for it. But as you travel up through places north of the 401, as you go west, there's absolutely no cell service. This is an issue, and we see this as a problem moving forward.

As we go through this and we talk about some of the issues that were addressed in this bill—in many cases, the cooling-off period in Bill 60 is 10 days; the CRTC is 30. No extra costs for unlimited services: This bill doesn't address it; the CRTC does. Trial period regulation: They address it; this bill does not. Month-to-month extension: We're glad they listened to that, because we think that would have been very disruptive, to have your cellphone end on the date your contract ended. We had some discussion with the minister about that. I know people myself who have had plans that have been over for years, and they just don't go in to renew the phone because they're happy with what they have and happy with the bill they have. Roaming charges cap: One of the biggest issues of shellshock is not addressed here; there's a cap in the federal bill.

We see that there are lots of places here where we have redundant legislation. Really, that's confusing now, because you have two sets of rules. Of course, the feds', where it's more stringent, take effect. We think that some work with the bill—and maybe through committee, we can make sure that they do agree or at least that they're handled at the federal level; we can take them out of here.

We want something that is really going to handle or provide a needed service to consumers, that makes it clear. There's no question that of the people I know, very few of them don't have cellphones. It's an important service that 10, 15 years ago nobody would have dreamt would have been so universally adopted. As the prices come down and as people adopt it, it's become part of their lifeline and really part of the 911 system. People feel, if they don't have it, and they've got some issues—they certainly see a need for it.

I see the wireless code issued in June of this year to take effect later this year. I really wonder how quickly—we talk about rushing this through. They gave six months. Is it reasonable to assume that we can ask carriers to issue new contracts in a matter of days to beat this plan? It's just a rush.

I look at this and I look at the need for this, and I just wonder why. We've sat on this for four years now. We have an economy that's in trouble. We have 600,000 people without jobs and nothing on the docket coming. I don't see anything in what I've seen coming up in this Legislative Assembly that's going to deal with jobs. We talk about consumer sentiment, and it's not very positive in this province. People are worried about their jobs. They're worried about what they're going to do tomorrow. I guess they're worried about being able to pay for their cellphone. It's the timing of it, and it just makes you wonder where they're going with this; and why they're not talking about the real issues?

In my riding, I went around, as I'm sure most people in this House did in July. I didn't hear anybody talk about

cellphones. I heard a lot of people talking about the economy and I heard people worrying about their jobs. I heard a lot of people talking about the gas plants, accountability. I went door-to-door. This one senior I met came to the door and she seemed to be kind of apologizing to me. She said, "You know, I had to do something today I've never done in my life. I voted for the Conservatives."

"I know Dalton McGuinty, knew their family well, liked him, but they messed with the money. There's no explanation for that. They just had no regard for the money, and look at the mess we're in."

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: Jim, get back on the bill. Come on.

Mr. Jim McDonell: But I'm talking about the issue of—why are we doing this now? It really makes you wonder. This is somebody—you know, I said, "You don't have to apologize to me for voting Conservative." It's accountability. Where is it? Where is the looking after what's really needed with this government? Where are we going with it?

When I review the bills, our analysis is that the federal one is a lot more stringent. It does a lot more. I'm not saying it wasn't required, but we're sitting here four years after it was introduced, and we're trying to panic it through. All it will likely do is—are we going to force cell companies to come up with a new contract that's redundant on December 1? I mean, there's a lot of ambiguity put into this. A lot of the things, as I say, are much more stringent in the federal law. We support what's in here, no question, but it's too late. You sat on it for four years. I don't know what we can say. It's hard to stand up and rally the troops around something that's already done.

Even when it was introduced last spring, we questioned the fact that going to a number, or 10 different—when the feds were talking about how they were in the midst of it, they would be introducing it. Of course, I agree that there's always that thought that we're going to put it out, and when's it going to come out? We heard this government do it for four years. I said, "Well, you know, it would be nice to think it's going to be out in the next few months," but I didn't quite believe them, either. But they didn't. They issued it on—what?—June 3? Now we're sitting here looking at trying to push our legislation, trying to beat them with a date? They gave six months for the companies to make the changes. Are we going to expect them to do it in two? There's a lot of work to be done. There's a lot of confusion with the consumers to do this. I think maybe all we're going to do is confuse them, because now we've got regulations that are superseded and more stringent.

The biggest complaint I hear is about the roaming fees. They're not even addressed here. Whereas at least here, they put a cap—the feds. It's something that we've really got to wonder where we're going. Prices, unlimited services—there are more limits put in with the CRTC one. You just go through it. The post-paid service contracts: stricter rules with the feds just all the way through, where the customers can find their information.

If you go with one—there's a benefit with going with one deal for the country, because it is seamless. People can move across the country. You don't expect your cell service to stop at the border. You expect it to move along the border. So the federal idea was something we were very much occurring—and we're disappointed that they didn't come out sooner themselves, and we were disappointed—we supported this bill in 2010. We're getting to the last half of 2013, and we're trying to ram something through. I wonder: Is it just—because it is an issue—

Interjection.

Mr. Jim McDonell: Well, but you had support from all three parties and a majority government, and you couldn't get it through, so I just wonder, were you serious about it? Was it an issue? Those are the questions I hear. Really, I don't hear anybody talking about cell service, because studies show that we have lower prices than our neighbours. So, as I say, I just wonder about where we are going. It's not what I heard when I went around the riding.

You talk about a member—calling up just last week. He came in with his hydro bill, asking how he's going to pay it. He said, "I got through last year. Hydro came out with an idea: 'Well, look, we'll let you go to two payments.'" He said, "What am I going to do? Take a mortgage out?" He said, "I can't go down to two payments. That doesn't help me at all."

We look for the reason why it's even a worry, and it's because of the mismanagement of the files—on many files. I mean, the energy file: We're adding a billion dollars a year in unnecessary costs. You look at spilling water over a dam. It's \$300 million here that our consumers pay for. The costs to get our neighbours to take our surplus power, because we have no management plan, is \$500 million, half a billion dollars. Think of what we could do with making this life affordable in Ontario. Think of the companies and the technology and the education we could provide, the nurses, the doctors. I mean, \$500 million, half a billion bucks—\$80 million to vent steam at our nuclear plants—because of our lack of plans.

1010

The Green Energy Act, it's again something—and I wonder about this bill. Is it just for show? Is it just to show that we've got something here that regardless of the costs—we're going to drive up costs getting companies now to move to legislation that is temporary because the other one takes effect December 1. I think if we sit back and look at—I'm sure there are a few issues and I think the minister—I have to commend her. There are a few issues that, of course, this CRTC code of conduct would not address and I think it's important that we do address those. But from our analysis, of the many things in this bill, it's down to one or two or three different items, really something that we'd be best to work with the feds to make sure there's a federal regulation on it.

I live in a border town and it's somewhat confusing because if you go 15 minutes to the east of us you're into Quebec and they have a different set of contracts than they do in Ontario. Of course, they'd have to produce two, depending where your residence was, but there's the

confusion. We've got Ottawa; we've got some big populations around that border. So having that national program is certainly a big benefit to us and I think a big benefit to the people right across the province.

I had the opportunity this summer to travel out to Vancouver. It's nice to be able to take your phone out there and know that the same rules apply, as opposed to if you happen to travel to the south; right away you're worried about roaming costs. Again, as I said, it's something that's not handled in this. We've heard crazy stories about people coming back from vacation and having thousands of dollars of roaming costs, which most times, I understand, have been mitigated somewhat, but certainly nobody wants to see a bill of that kind. This bill does not talk about that.

The CRTC does; they put a limit of \$50, which is probably about where we'd like to see it. There is some limit or some responsibility to the consumer but I think that's something that's a happy medium that looks after the rights of the consumer and the contracts that these companies must sign with their foreign carriers.

I had three children at home over the summer, so cell bills and data services are up. I got a warning from my supplier that I was up at 80% and then 90% and 95% of my data load. Some of those services are already coming across, so it's good to see that. With some teenagers, sometimes you have a lot of impact with just what their usage is. They've grown to use these phones like they're another appendage, and we see lots of advances in technologies.

I know there's talk about a list of services or products, but I haven't seen any products around the world—I take an interest in technology—that aren't available in Canada quickly, whether it be the iPhone or the Samsung Galaxy phones. They're all here relatively quick, so I think that that's looked after. I think that's part of the stability with a federal regulation, because one thing we have in Canada, we have a smaller market certainly than most of the larger industrialized countries. We want to make sure that we have a program, when the major carriers are coming in here, the major suppliers, that we're worthwhile to enter, and we're worthwhile to enter early. We want to make sure that we have the latest Apples or the latest Samsungs, or wherever the technology is. But to do that, you have to make it that when a company comes in, it can come in easily: They know the rules up front, they know what they have to follow and they also have access to the full 33 million people, if possible, coming in. Granted, Ontario is a large province, but we see examples in a lot of the latest pharmaceuticals, where a lot of this government regulation—the TSSA, with new equipment that doesn't come into this province because the extra cost of getting them approved in Ontario is not worth their time.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): May I ask the member—since it is time, a quarter after 10. We will be recessed until 10:30.

The House recessed from 1015 to 1030.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Frank Klees: I want to welcome to the gallery today Mrs. Michelle Gallagher-Prowse, who is the mother of page James Prowse, who comes from the great riding of Newmarket-Aurora.

Mr. Jim McDonell: I'd like to introduce Simon Chapelle, who is here today. His son is a page in the Legislature. Welcome him to the Legislature.

Mr. Todd Smith: It's a pleasure to welcome the father of one of our pages, Ian Chapelle. His father's name is Simon, and he's back for a second straight day, he's enjoyed the theatre so much; and my friend and Simon's friend and Ian's friend, James O'Halloran, also from Prince Edward-Hastings riding. Welcome to the Legislature.

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: I'd like to welcome Paul Horning, father of Peyton Horning, who's from Leeds-Grenville. Welcome to the Legislature.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Today with us here in the Speaker's gallery we have the newly appointed Consul General of the Federal Republic of Germany at Toronto, Mr. Walter Stechel. It's wonderful for you to be here. Congratulations on your appointment.

Also in the Speaker's gallery today we have an American delegation from the Eastern Regional Conference of the Council of State Governments, an interparliamentary association in which the Legislative Assembly of Ontario has membership. They are led here today by Assemblyman Robin Schimminger and by staff of the ERC, Wendell Hannaford and Earl Eisenhart. Welcome, and thank you for being here.

LEGISLATIVE PAGES

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I know this is something that we all look forward to. I would now ask all of our members to join me in welcoming our first group of legislative pages serving in the first session of the 40th Parliament. Please assemble.

From Whitby-Oshawa, Pratah Bhatt; from Prince Edward-Hastings, Ian Chapelle; from Huron-Bruce, Kyle Cronin; from Northumberland-Quinte West, Kieva Earle; from St. Paul's, Sean Garner; from Niagara Falls, Erica George; from Leeds-Grenville, Peyton Horning; from Eglinton-Lawrence, William Howard-Waddingham; from Mississauga-Streetsville, Massoma Kisob; from York West, Efua Mensimah Kwofie; from Don Valley East, Megan Lai; from Hamilton Mountain, Gabrielle Le Donne; from Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke, Bridget McCann; from Mississauga-Brampton South, Aly Muhammad Mithani; from Newmarket-Aurora, James Prowse; from Scarborough Centre, Ravicha Ravinthiran; from London West, Taylor Roch; from Stormont-Dundas-South Glengarry, Jasper Ross; from Willowdale, Katherine Tom; and from Scarborough-Agincourt, Daniel Velyvis.

Welcome.

Applause.

ORAL QUESTIONS

GOVERNMENT'S RECORD

Mr. Tim Hudak: As I begin, Speaker, I want to congratulate my new critic for finance, Vic Fedeli, and my new critic for accountability, Doug Holyday. Welcome to the new positions.

Premier, you had a press conference yesterday, and you basically said that if we don't pass legislation from the last session on tanning beds and the Local Food Act, you would call an election. Quite frankly, Premier, that's like walking in here, throwing up your hands and saying that you've got no new ideas. You've spent the last eight months in conversations. You spent the last three months of the summer on a province-wide hand-holding tour. Premier, you may have given everybody a group hug, but all you came back with was sore arms and no new ideas.

If that's the best you can do, isn't it time to actually change this government and get our province back on track?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Be seated, please.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Order, please. Yesterday's comment applied.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): There were other people in your own caucus speaking.

Yesterday's comment applied, so I will start right off by going to the individual member, and a warning means the last time.

Premier.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I notice—

Interjection.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: My arms are fine, actually. I've got quite strong arms. I was on a canoe trip, and it was good.

Mr. Speaker, I just want to clarify. I'm glad that the Leader of the Opposition was paying attention to my press conference. I notice that he couldn't actually deliver the question with a straight face, but I appreciate that he listened. I was using that piece of legislation, which is a very important piece of legislation—protecting kids from cancer and melanoma is very, very important, and I was using that piece of legislation among others as an example. It was an example of this: There are many things that we can work together on. There is a lot of common ground, things that the opposition party and the third party have said that they agree on. I said, "Let's work on those things together, and let's make the Legislature work."

1040

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Tim Hudak: Well, when it comes to the tanning bed legislation, this is a government that wheeled out cancer patients to try to distract attention from your gas

plant scandal. So, please, don't give us any lectures on that kind of hypocrisy.

So you want to co-operate; you want to work together. Here's an idea for you, Premier, because you don't seem to have any ideas when it comes to jobs: The Green Energy Act is economic suicide. It's driving up our hydro rates. It's costing us jobs. It is tearing down communities right down the middle. If you did your big group hug across the province, I know you heard it.

Will you join with us? Will you co-operate? Will you end the Green Energy Act to bring jobs back?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Premier.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: We're not going to go backwards. I just came from a meeting called Meeting of the Minds; it's happening at the Brick Works in Toronto. People from all over the world have come here because Ontario is a hub of sustainability. Ontario is developing technology in clean water, in transit and in green technology for energy. We are exporting that knowledge. That is the future, Mr. Speaker.

The Leader of the Opposition seems to want to take us back. That's not where we are going. We're going forward. We're tapping into our strengths. We're tapping into our innovative culture here in Ontario. Those are the investments that we're going to make. Those are the investments we are making. We'll move ahead with him or without him, but we'd like to have him with us.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated.

Final supplementary.

Mr. Tim Hudak: Premier, you're not moving forward; you're barely treading water with your embrace of Dalton McGuinty's agenda. You know what? We're drowning in runaway hydro costs, and it's costing us jobs. I know you're stuck in the past. You want to stick to the McGuinty agenda. You won't accept our new ideas on ending the Green Energy Act.

Here's another one for you: Your College of Trades is nothing more than a giveaway to the special interests. It's going to stand in the way of young people getting good jobs. It has runaway costs that involve a new tax on anyone from electricians to hairstylists. You want to co-operate? You want good ideas? End that College of Trades boondoggle before it even gets going.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Be seated.

Premier.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Let me just talk about some of the things that I've been doing since I came into this office and the investments that we've been making, investments in business: \$17.6 million to support business in regions across the province. That's leveraging \$133 million in investments and retaining and creating 2,800 jobs. That's the kind of investment we need to make—\$50 million in new venture capital.

The Leader of the Opposition talks about us not moving forward. In fact, he is stuck in the past. He does not have ideas for how to move forward, how to create entrepreneurship, how to make sure that capital gets invested in new ideas that create new business and new opportunities for people in the province. That's what \$50 million of venture capital will do. That's the kind of strategic investment that we're making to create jobs and create the conditions for jobs to be created.

ONTARIO PUBLIC SERVICE

Mr. Tim Hudak: Back to the Premier: Look, we've put out over 200 pages of bold new ideas in our Paths to Prosperity to turn our province around and get our economy moving again, and you can't find one single idea? You don't want to co-operate; you want to be stuck in the past of the Dalton McGuinty agenda. I've given two ideas, and you reject them out of hand. You rejected arbitration reform out of hand. You may have ridden around in your canoe, but you haven't actually brought forward one single new idea to get our economy going and to get spending under control.

Let me try one more time. I know you're running scared of the public sector union bosses. You're basically in their pockets. Why don't you stay in your place and say no and that you agree with PCs and will bring in a province-wide, across-the-board wage freeze that will save us \$2 billion a year right there?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: The underpinnings of what the Leader of the Opposition is talking about today and often talks about is that we should cut services, that we should fire workers. So we should fire 10,000 education workers, we should cancel programs and reduce those programs, reduce those services to people, and that we should undermine organized labour. That is one of the pillars of his philosophy. We don't hold with that. We believe that organized labour, that workers working together, have created safe workplaces over the decades. A lot of good has been done in the name of collective bargaining. We believe in those processes, but the Leader of the Opposition does not, and that is evident from those 200 pages that he has put out, and it's evident in every question that he asks in the House.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Tim Hudak: Let me give another example of how the Premier is running scared when it comes to the government union bosses in our province, the very same union bosses that held our kids hostage. They cancelled after-school activities; they cancelled graduations and held our kids and our grandkids hostage. What did you do? You gave away the ship; you gave them a raise. You ran scared from them and you ran one of them as your candidate in London West. What does that say about your leadership? What does that say about your capacity to actually get the books back and balanced in the province?

You want to co-operate? You want to get things done for the people of Ontario? You want to balance the books?

Cancel that deal; we can't afford it. They shouldn't get a raise. They held our province hostage.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I go back to what I just said, that the premise of many of the Leader of the Opposition's questions is about creating discord in the public sector. It's about labour unrest. It's about breaking relationships that are in the best interests of our children and the students in our schools. It is in the best interests of the children in our schools and the students all across the province that we have a good working relationship.

We worked within the fiscal arrangement that we had put in place. There was no additional money that went into the agreements. We came up with the savings that we had identified. But what we did was we changed the relationship and what we've got is a working relationship with the education sector. We're going to maintain that because it's in the best interests of every single child who's starting school today, who's been in school, and every student in this province.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary?

Mr. Tim Hudak: Premier, respectfully, what we got is you gave away the store. We got the biggest deficits and debts we've ever had in the history of the province of Ontario. We can't afford it; it's got to come to an end. You want to co-operate; you want to get things done. I put idea after idea on the floor, to bring accountability for taxpayers, to get our economy moving again.

You've gone across the province now, Premier, for eight months. You've given a lot of group hugs. It's time for action. We've got ideas if you don't. We're ready to go. Let's actually put those ideas on the table and turn our province around, get our books back in balance so our great province of Ontario will lead again. That's our plan.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I spoke about a couple of the things that we have done: investing in infrastructure, investing in business, investing in people. If we do those things and if we do them strategically, as we have been—for example, the investments in infrastructure that will come from the \$100-million fund for municipal bridges, roads and important infrastructure; that's something that I heard about for a number of years when I was Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing and when I was Minister of Transportation. I would think that it would be the kind of thing that the Leader of the Opposition actually would support, because it is going to support rural and northern municipalities that have aging infrastructure and that know that that infrastructure is one of the conditions to bring business to their communities. So, \$100 million a year is a significant, significant investment in that infrastructure.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Renfrew, come to order.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: That's the kind of thing that I would have thought the Leader of the Opposition would have supported, and it's the kind of thing that we are going to continue to do, because that's what will

create jobs; it will create opportunity in every community across the province.

GOVERNMENT'S AGENDA

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is to the Premier. As the Premier knows, we expect the Legislature to deliver the results that she promised Ontarians this session. So could she just take maybe a minute or so to explain exactly what her priorities are?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I think I've been doing that. I've said that investing in people, investing in business, investing in infrastructure are the priorities that I believe will get the economy going and will create jobs, and that is already happening. The investments that we are making, the support that we're putting in place and the changes that we're making are what are going to create those jobs and help people in their day-to-day lives. That's our priority. Whether it is creating more opportunities and more services in home care, whether it's the Youth Employment Fund or whether it's investments in transit, those are the kinds of things that are going to get the economy going and are going to create jobs across the province.

1050

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Well, Speaker, media reports this week laid out some of the government's supposed priorities for this session, and they included lowering auto insurance rates, establishing a Financial Accountability Office and getting to work on putting people to work. Those are the things that topped the list.

Every one of those is a New Democrat idea, a New Democrat initiative. The Premier's own projects, like her plan to hit families with new, unfair taxes and road tolls, are nowhere to be seen.

Does the Premier have some secret priorities of her own that she hasn't yet shared with us? Or does she sincerely expect people to believe that New Democrats are trying to stop the government from implementing measures that we forced them to adopt in the first place?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: You know, it's tempting to have an ongoing debate about whose idea it was to support young people getting into work, but I can tell you, that is something that we have been talking about for a long time. The leader of the third party can claim it for her own, but the fact is, it is an idea that needs to be acted on. We found common ground on it; it's in our budget—as is our commitment to investing in transit. That is an idea that I have not heard the leader of the third party talk about: investing in infrastructure, investing in transit that we know is critical to the economy of this region, but also to the economy of the province.

That's an idea that we are acting on, and that did not come from anywhere except from these benches.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Well, Speaker, here's what people see: a government that has promised action on

jobs, but seems more interested in photo ops than job creation; a government that has promised to close corporate tax loopholes, but can't be bothered to even close any; a government that has promised to make life affordable and lower auto insurance rates, but seems more interested in protecting industry profits than drivers' wallets.

Is the Premier interested in actually delivering results, or does she just want to play the same old games that help the Ontario Liberals hold on to power and leave Ontarians falling further and further behind?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I know that the leader of the third party understands that the 43,600 net new jobs that were created in Ontario are a result of good policies, good fundamentals and our recovery from the economic downturn. I know she will give credit to the people of Ontario and the businesses of Ontario for creating those jobs.

We're going to continue to support those businesses and to support the people of Ontario in that good work, and part of that is creating conditions so that new jobs can be created and part of that is investing in transit.

Mr. Speaker, the leader of the third party also knows that the reduction in auto insurance that we have committed to is under way. We have made that commitment. The Minister of Finance has outlined the way that we're going to get there. We're acting on that, it was in our budget, and we will continue to remove the costs from the system. That will allow those average auto insurance costs to go down.

MEMBERS' PRIVILEGES

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My next question is also for the Premier. Yesterday in this place, the Premier said she will "make sure that, as questions are asked, they get answered." But when it comes to the actions of certain senior Liberal insiders, some pretty key questions simply aren't being answered.

Does the Premier think that's acceptable?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I'd love to answer that question, Mr. Speaker, but I don't actually know what the leader of the third party is talking about.

I will just say that, in general, when there are questions that are asked, we want the answers to be forthcoming. That's what I've said all along. If she's talking about questions at committee, we have provided the opportunity for questions to be asked of me, many of my colleagues and the former Premier, and we will absolutely continue to answer questions as they are asked.

If the leader of the third party wants to be more specific, I'll be more specific in my answer.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Well, the Premier can actually keep her promise. She can make sure that, when questions are asked, they get answered. She can tell her government House leader to put this on the table and make it clear that questions about emails concerning senior Liberals and their attempts to get the Speaker to fall in line are actually answered.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock. I'd like to remind the leader of the third party that the ruling has been made and that particular reference should not be used in the House. I would ask the member to rephrase the question, please.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: I'm asking the Premier to allow questions to be asked at committee. This has nothing to do with the point of privilege, Premier. What this has to do with is making sure that your promise that people's answers will be had, that their questions will be answered, actually occurs. That's something that you have promised and it's something you can see happen: As a leader, as a Premier, make sure that the answers come to committee. That is the question.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Mr. Speaker, I have been categorical in my support for an open process at committee. The committee makes its decisions; the committee works within the rules; the Chair of the committee works within the rules, the committee works with the Clerk's office, and that process has to unfold within the rules. I am completely supportive of questions that are being asked, being answered. But the committee has to operate as an entity with the advice of the Clerk, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: The Premier has a pretty easy choice: She can keep protecting Liberal insiders or she can open up the gas plant committee so that when questions are asked, they actually get answered. What is this Premier going to do? Is she going to continue to protect Liberal insiders, or is she going to take that leadership role that she likes to brag about—about transparency and openness and answering all the questions—and actually make sure that the committee is able to ask the important questions and get them answered?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I will just reinforce what I said, which is that the committee has my blessing and my support and my encouragement to do its work. When I came into this office, I opened up the process. In fact, there have been 135,000 documents that have gone to committee, 32 motions, 53 witnesses, 90 hours. That committee has the right to do its work, and, as I say, I encourage that work.

What I do take some offence at is the allegation that somehow I'm protecting or obstructing that process. That is not the case. It is quite to the contrary. I have opened up the process. I want those questions answered. But you know, what I also want is for us to be able to do the work of the people of Ontario, make sure that we move forward and we make the investments and put the supports in place so we can create jobs and we can help people in their lives.

ONTARIO ECONOMY

Mr. Victor Fedeli: My question this morning is for the Premier. Five years ago this week, the world entered its deepest financial crisis in 80 years. Families suffered and Ontario suffered. Since then, other jurisdictions made

the hard choices. They cut spending, they restored jobs and prosperity to taxpayers, but not Ontario—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock. The Attorney General will come to order. The member for Etobicoke North will come to order.

Continue, please.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Your government has saddled this province with over \$250 billion of debt, with no plan to balance the budget, no plan to restore lost manufacturing jobs, no plan to provide hope for Ontario's youth. Even the Toronto Star today is questioning your lack of a plan and your "piecemeal approach to governing."

Premier, here's your chance: Tell the people of Ontario which drastic cuts you plan to balance the budget.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: To the Minister of Finance.

Hon. Charles Sousa: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to take this opportunity to congratulate the member on his new appointment as the critic to the finance committee. I look forward to a very collaborative approach and working on behalf of all Ontarians for the benefit of Ontarians. One of the ways we do that is to be very careful and very honest in terms of what has been achieved.

1100

The member talks about having a plan, which we've outlined very clearly in this budget. We have a six-point plan that talks about the path to balance.

More importantly, this afternoon, we will release at public accounts an audited statement talking about the achievements that this government has been able to do over the course of the last number of years as it relates to the budget and as it relates to the decisions that we've made—tough decisions that the opposition have not been prepared to make, but we have done so. We have done so in a very balanced approach and a very fair approach.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Premier, let me refresh your memory. While governments around the world focused on rebuilding their economies, your government focused on keeping Liberal operatives employed, pouring \$585 million into cancelled gas plants.

While families wondered how they would plan for retirement or fund their children's education, unelected Liberals plotted to hijack an election, treating taxpayers' dollars like Liberal Party donations.

Good jobs keep leaving our province, and young people are leaving to follow that work. Your overspending is now hurting the things Ontarians care about. Look at your cuts to physiotherapy services. All your government can do—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Minister of the Environment and the member from Peterborough, come to order—last time.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: —is simply jump from one scandal to another. Premier, level with us: Are you just too busy protecting Liberal interests to be bothered to work on creating jobs and economic growth for Ontario?

Hon. Charles Sousa: The province—and the people of Ontario, more importantly—have been working very hard to ensure its recovery. The member opposite has just contradicted himself twice. On the one hand, they want across-the-board cuts that would hamper our sensitive recovery. On the other hand, they complain when cuts occur. You can't have it both ways; you can't suck and blow. We need to ensure a balanced recovery.

As a result of those decisions, 180% of those jobs have been recovered. Some 477,000 net new jobs have occurred.

We have maintained and we have been very direct and very strategic in our investments, which have enabled us to be more competitive in the long term. That is what's important: the dividend that's going to accrue of those investments to afford the debt that has been accumulated. We are going to consider and we're going to take every action necessary to protect Ontario—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. New question.

PUBLIC TRANSIT

Mr. Rosario Marchese: To the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure: Some \$85 million have been spent to create a transit plan for Scarborough, but last week the minister drew a line and two dots on a map and happily flushed this \$85 million down the toilet.

Will the minister tell Ontarians how much of their money he will waste, in total, as he pursues a shortened, delayed and technologically uncertain subway?

Hon. Glen R. Murray: We've been working very closely with Metrolinx, with Places to Grow. We've identified, through our iCorridor system—which is now one of the most advanced planning tools—the optimal route.

Metrolinx's desire, I think, in their communications with me to this point, is to try to not change the plan again, so we're sticking with the original route.

I think there's a strong agreement that in Places to Grow, the Scarborough Town Centre is the focal point of intensification in the renewal of Scarborough and the creation of jobs. We have the Ministry of Transportation working. This is an evidence-based system. No one has drawn a line on the map. This is millions of dollars in planning, and in a plan that is on that route.

What we're doing, to comply with many of the New Democrats' and city hall's demands on us, is changing the technology and running on the same line.

I don't think this is complicated; this is pretty straightforward. This will cost about \$1.8 billion—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Supplementary?

Mr. Rosario Marchese: A responsible minister—indeed, a responsible government—would take a moment to consider their costs—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities, come to order. I just want you to stop.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: —to consider the costs, delays and risks associated with a major change to an infrastructure investment, particularly after the gas plant fiasco in Mississauga and Oakville.

We know that taxpayers will be on the hook for at least \$85 million to derail transit plans in Scarborough. Can the minister tell Ontarians exactly what the total cost will be for the confusion, the chaos, the delays and the waste of the minister's transit musings?

Hon. Glen R. Murray: Mr. Speaker, we have, and I think my colleagues from Scarborough will tell you, because most of them here have been working on this for over 20 years as city councillors, to deliver on the promises of many, which is to deliver a properly well-planned subway to the Scarborough Town Centre, which is what we're doing, and to do it cost-effectively and to use it.

Mr. Speaker, I would invite the member opposite to join me this afternoon at the Meeting of the Minds, where I will be outlining and demonstrating GeoPortal and iCorridor and our advance planning techniques. This government is prepared to go further into an open-data model, which my friend, Minister Milloy, is leading.

I am confused, Mr. Speaker, only by one thing here. I am confused about what the NDP is doing in Scarborough. Do you support a subway, or do you not support a subway? How would you finance it? Where is the money coming from? What is the alignment you will use? I am absolutely bewildered by the 15 different positions the NDP seems to have on this. When they have one, maybe we can have a conversation.

SCHOOL SAFETY

Ms. Soo Wong: My question is for the Minister of Education. As the new school year begins, we are reminded of our collective responsibility to ensure the safety of our students in the classroom. As a former school board trustee, I know that our school boards, principals and teachers take school safety seriously and have measures in place to make sure our students are protected.

Paul Harvey, the principal in one of my schools, Tam O'Shanter public school in my riding of Scarborough-Agincourt, tells me that parents who drop off their sons and daughters at their school take comfort to know that our schools are locked during school hours. This gives parents the confidence that they deserve and protects our students. Parents in my riding also want to know what our government is doing to ensure that our students are safe in a learning environment.

Speaker, through you to the Minister of Education, can she please inform the House what our government is doing to ensure our schools are safe?

Hon. Liz Sandals: The member from Scarborough-Agincourt is absolutely right that the safety of our students

must be our top priority. Our government has worked very hard to make our schools some of the safest in the world.

Last year, we reopened the Safe Welcome Program with an additional investment of \$10 million to give school staff more control over who enters the school during school hours. I'm pleased to report that over 3,300 elementary schools in Ontario that have received funding from this program now have the Safe Welcome equipment installed in their schools.

Any school that received this funding locks their doors during school hours in order to restrict access through the school office and to keep their school safe. All school boards in Ontario are also required to have emergency lockdown protocols in place, which they work out with the local police force, and we've provided \$1.7 million to support—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Supplementary?

Ms. Soo Wong: I want to thank the minister for her response and also congratulate her on reopening the Safe Welcome Program and all the work she has done to ensure our schools are safe.

Speaker, a comprehensive approach to school safety is very important to every member of this House. The security of schools is paramount, but we also need to have a positive school climate inside and outside the classroom, helping our students to succeed. Many parents in my community are concerned about bullying in our schools and want to ensure that students have the support they need. Internet bullying comes with harmful effects. Our students feel isolated and afraid to come to school.

Ms. Zhang, a teacher at Highland Heights public school in my riding, said, "I work" very "hard to provide a safe and encouraging" environment "for all my students to learn, because I know that when a student is bullied and is fearful, their academics and social well-being suffer."

Mr. Speaker, through you to the minister, can she tell the House what this government is doing to combat bullying both inside and outside the classroom?

Hon. Liz Sandals: Thank you, again, to the member for this really important question, because every student in Ontario has the right to feel safe and accepted while they're at school. That's exactly why our government passed the Accepting Schools Act just last year. For the first time ever, we have defined bullying in legislation so that every student, every teacher, every principal and every parent knows exactly what we are talking about when we say bullying is not okay in our schools.

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The definition also includes a definition of cyberbullying, because we know that bullying that takes place over the Internet, out of school, also has an impact on the school climate. So we are making sure that we build a positive school—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. New question.

PUBLIC TRANSIT

Mr. Douglas C. Holyday: Mr. Speaker, my question is to the Premier. Madam Premier, you are spending 10 billion taxpayer dollars each year paying down the debt on the interest of the runaway debt that the Liberals have run up. You say your government is committed to transit. Maybe you can tell transit riders how many kilometres of subway could be built with \$10 billion.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure who should be taking that question, so I will take the question.

I think what it's about is questioning the advisability of investing in transit. I believe and we believe on this side of the House that transit is a critical condition for economic growth in this region and, in fact, in many parts of the province, so we're not going to back away from investing in transit. We are on track to eliminate the deficit by 2017-18. The Minister of Finance is going to present the public accounts this afternoon, and the member opposite will be able to see that.

But the fact is, Mr. Speaker, if we don't make these investments, if we don't invest in transit and the other conditions for growth, then we will not grow the economy and we will not create those jobs, and I'm not willing to go there, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Douglas C. Holyday: Madam Premier, we can't build transit if you don't get your runaway spending under control. Without a sound plan for this province, you can't deliver the solutions Toronto so desperately needs. You and your government had 10 years to build subways in this city but you spent 10 years running up the debt instead. Now your transportation minister makes a new, confusing announcement each week. You've spent 10 years throwing away money we could have spent on subways. Why should transit riders trust you now?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Thank you.

Premier?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I think the member opposite should talk to the people in Brampton and Mississauga, the people who are taking the GO train from Kitchener-Waterloo, the people who are taking the GO train from Barrie, the people who are going to be taking the subway to York University. I think the member opposite should talk to those people about the investments this government has made.

The fact is that subsequent governments, government after government in this Legislature, did not invest in transit, or started to invest in transit and then filled in the holes. The member opposite is part of a party that absolutely did that.

We have been investing in transit since we came into this office. The fact is that there are some contentious lines and we have made decisions—without the help, I must say, of any consistency from the city council of

which the member opposite was a member. Mr. Speaker, we will continue to invest in transit.

COLLECTIVE BARGAINING

Mr. Taras Natyshak: My question is to the Premier. Premier, you have recently indicated your support for a PC private member's bill that would dismantle a long-standing collective agreement between EllisDon and several building trades in this province. Your government has a record now of joining with the PCs to subvert and circumvent collective bargaining rights, as it did last year with our province's teachers with the imposition of Bill 115.

Premier, can you explain why the passage of a Conservative private member's bill, custom-built for the benefit of a single company, is one of your key priorities?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: As I said yesterday when I was asked about this question by the press, this is an anomalous situation that arose out of a decision that was made in the 1950s. My understanding of the private member's bill is that it would rectify that situation and would actually level the playing field in terms of the construction industry in the province. To me, Mr. Speaker, it only makes sense for there to be some fairness in the system, so that's what this private member's bill would do. In fact, the Labour Relations Board gave EllisDon, I believe, two years to approach the Legislature to make this change, so it's an anomaly that needs to be fixed in order to level the playing field.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Taras Natyshak: Premier, you said that your tenure as the Premier was going to be different from your predecessor, but it seems that bargaining rights in this province are no safer now than they were when Dalton McGuinty was the Premier.

Premier, the people of the province of Ontario sent us here to deliver results, and they are concerned when they see Liberals and Conservatives joining together, working overtime to pass a bill that helps one single company, especially when the women and men who work for that company have a major problem with this bill. Even the member from Lanark has a problem with this bill. Premier, why is it that you're so determined to team up with the Hudak Conservatives to ram this bill through?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I understand the politics of trying to make this into an ideological fight. That's not what it is; it's a practical solution to an anomalous situation that happened many, many years ago, before the member was born. I, however, was born. It needs to be corrected. We need to make sure that there's a level playing field in the construction industry.

I'm a practical politician. I'm not going to get trapped in ideological rants because when there's a practical solution to a problem, let's work on that. That's why we're supporting the private member's bill.

STUDENT ASSISTANCE

Ms. Helena Jaczek: My question is for the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities. Minister, as you

know, there are a great many young people in my great riding of Oak Ridges—Markham who attend post-secondary institutions across the province. Some of these individuals are in tough financial positions and rely on the support of the Ontario Student Assistance Program, or OSAP. Sometimes staying in school is still a struggle, and we need to address the changing needs of our society.

Minister, can you please tell me what steps the government is taking to increase accessibility to post-secondary education in our province to ensure all students have the opportunities they need to succeed?

Hon. Brad Duguid: I want to thank the member for an excellent question. Our government is very committed to making sure that our post-secondary education system is accessible to all our students on the basis of ability to learn, not ability to pay. Helping Ontario students with the cost of tuition is part of our plan to keep post-secondary education accessible and affordable for all of our families. That leads, frankly, to a stronger economy, and it creates good jobs.

Since we introduced the 30% off tuition grant in January 2012, 230,000 students across Ontario of low and middle incomes have benefited. That's pretty spectacular. It's a lot of help to our students. Since 2003, our investments have more than doubled the number of students qualifying for aid, while enrolment has increased by 40%.

Despite tough fiscal times, this government will continue to ensure that our students have access to affordable and high-quality post-secondary education, for all of our students.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Helena Jaczek: I'm pleased to hear that we are working to make post-secondary education even more financially accessible to create equal opportunities for all students across Ontario.

Each year, in my great riding of Oak Ridges—Markham, there is an increasing number of students preparing to enter their final year of post-secondary education. These students need to know that, on graduation, they will have access to good jobs and have the assistance they need to pay off their loans. However, some students will still find it difficult to accomplish this promptly. Minister, what steps are being taken to support these students as they transition out of the post-secondary system and into the workforce?

Hon. Brad Duguid: Again, I want to thank the member for another good question. While our students work towards obtaining a high-quality education, it's our responsibility to ensure that we provide necessary assistance after graduation. That's why we've created the Ontario Student Opportunity Grant to limit OSAP debt and the Repayment Assistance Plan to reduce the burden on our students. This program provides young people with income-sensitive support during the repayment of their loans.

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We've also created, and we just announced this past summer, the Youth Employment Fund, to provide 25,000

young people with an entry point to long-term employment through job placements that offer a chance to learn work skills, experience the real workplace and earn an income at the same time.

Our government remains committed to supporting young people as they work to build their lives and careers debt-free in Ontario, and we're going to keep doing everything we can through our youth jobs strategy to make sure that our young people get a great start, get into that workplace and help us build a stronger economy—for those young people today and for us into the future.

POWER PLANTS

Mr. Rob Leone: My question is to the Premier. Premier, you can stand here in this House and say that you've learned from your mistakes, but the stark reality is that if the opportunity to cancel gas plants came along again, you'd cancel them again, stick taxpayers with the bill again and worry about the fallout afterwards.

After Liberal backroom spin-master Don Guy admitted to cancelling the Mississauga gas plant without knowing the full costs, the member from Nipissing answered, "It's ... no wonder ... Liberals continue to raise taxes." Shockingly, the member from Vaughan interjected, "And win elections." Can you believe that, Mr. Speaker? This shows exactly how little regard the member from Vaughan has for the taxpayers of this province—that pouring \$600 million down the drain is all in a day's work. This is the culture of the Liberal Party: If you win the election, nothing else matters.

Premier, since you were busy dialling up the election rhetoric yesterday, can you tell us what you have planned to buy votes in the next election?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: House leader.

Hon. John Milloy: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to share with members a story of what happened to me this summer. I was at a barbecue, and a constituent came up to me and said, "You know, on this gas plant issue, I was shocked to learn that both the Tories and the NDP wanted to cancel it as well. You should tell that story." So I plan to tell that story.

I have here a brochure from Mary Anne DeMonte-Whelan, the Ontario PC candidate. She said, "The only party that will stop the Sherway power plant is the Ontario PC Party. On October 6, vote Ontario PC." I have Geoff Janoscik, the candidate in Mississauga South for the Conservatives. He said, "Only Conservative leader Tim Hudak will cancel the Eastern Power gas plant slated to be built on Loreland Ave."

I can go on, and I will in the supplementary, because it was a promise they made and one that we kept.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Rob Leone: Well, I hope the government House leader told that person at that barbecue that you sited the gas plants there that cost half a billion dollars to cancel.

But back to the Premier: Premier, your government is incapable of coming clean to the public. You're not transparent just because you use the word "transparent."

Actions speak louder than words, and yours is a government that has tried to sell a myth: a government that releases public numbers they knew to be low, while concealing the true cost; a government that says it wants to have all the answers, but then stalls and restricts what can be asked in committee; a government that says that they've released all the documents, even after systematically deleting emails so that the truth would be lost forever.

I have little interest in the number of documents you've handed over if 50 to 100 of the most incriminating have been deleted forever. Premier, how can we believe anything you say when your actions are the exact opposite of your rhetoric?

Hon. John Milloy: Mr. Speaker, this is one of my favourites: the text of the Mississauga South PC candidate robocalls—they know a lot about robocalls over here.

"Hi there. This is Geoff Janoscik, your Mississauga South Ontario PC candidate. I'm calling about the McGuinty-Sousa power plant that the Liberal government decided to build in your backyard. I am against this power plant, and as your MPP, I will fight to stop the power plant from being built....

"[O]ur team has been knocking on doors every single evening for several months, talking about the power plant and making sure that we defeat the Liberals in this riding and put an end to their bad decisions."

The fact of the matter is that all parties in this House opposed that power plant. The PCs claimed that they were the only ones that would stop it. In fact, we welcome the new member to their ranks, from Etobicoke—Lakeshore, who himself opposed the power plant.

Mr. Speaker, 19 power plants were sited and 17 of them were done correctly—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. New question.

CHILDREN'S SERVICES

Miss Monique Taylor: My question is to the Premier. Children's aid societies across the province are facing deep cuts to services following a \$50-million cut by this government. For the last five months, some of our province's most vulnerable children in Hamilton, London, Thunder Bay, Niagara, Waterloo and more than a dozen other communities are facing a future without the support they need.

My question is simple: Why does the government think it's okay to throw away hundreds of millions of dollars in gas plant scandals but cut services to our most vulnerable children?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Children and Youth Services.

Hon. Teresa Piruzza: Thank you for the question. We had this discussion in this House in the last session with respect to the funding for CASs across the province. Our funding for CASs has not been cut. We know that.

Our investments still stand at \$1.5 billion. That budget has not been cut. We know that.

We are implementing a new funding formula to make it more equitable, to make it fairer across the province. In the past, it has been based on historical expenditures. We are now basing it on community factors, socio-economic factors and variables that will make it fairer. Through this, we are doing it in a fair way. We are transitioning this across the province over the next five years. These are changes that have been recommended by a commission. These are changes that have been approved and recommended through the OACAS.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary? The member for Welland.

Ms. Cindy Forster: Thank you, Speaker. My question is to the minister as well. In my Welland riding, a regionalized specialized facility for young people in foster care will be shut down in November, resulting in the layoff of 20 of 45 staff. This 37-year-old facility has been a fixture in Welland and Niagara, and as the spokesperson for family and children's services is reported as commenting, "The centre was closed because it was not financially viable anymore." To be clear, this decision is not being made in order to improve outcomes for the 20 youth in this centre home.

What does the minister have to say to the youth, to the families, to the workers and to the local long-standing service that says it has no other choice but to close the doors?

Hon. Teresa Piruzza: Thank you for that question. Let me reiterate that our priority is for our children who are in service. With respect to that, the kids are not being put at risk. Those beds are not being lost. In this case, the services and supports previously offered are going to be transferred to a nearby facility. Child protection services will not be affected. The changes in the system will help create a more viable and sustainable child welfare system, something that I think all of us are working towards.

Our overall provincial investment in this province is not changing. It remains the same. We're making it fair across the province, and we will always keep children at the centre of all the decisions we make with respect to funding in this province.

CYBERBULLYING

Mr. Phil McNeely: My question is for the Attorney General. I know that Ontario has been concerned about the non-consensual distribution of intimate images for a number of years. I also acknowledge that we've asked the federal government since 2011 to amend the Criminal Code to protect the people of Ontario from the harms of cyberbullying. Can the Attorney General please provide us an update on the issue of what improvements our government has made in criminalizing the non-consensual distribution of intimate images?

Hon. John Gerretsen: I know this member is concerned about this issue, as we all are in this House. I guess it's the result of technology that these kinds of situ-

ations are existing right now, and something definitely should be done about this.

He's quite correct that, since 2011, both the Attorneys General of the day, as well as the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services and the minister responsible for women's issues, have been calling upon the federal government to amend the Criminal Code to make it an offence to distribute intimate photos or video recordings of a person without that person's consent.

The issue has been raised a number of times at federal-provincial meetings. I've had recent correspondence with the Minister of the Attorney General from Nova Scotia as well. This issue will be raised again at our fall meetings, and we hope that during this session of the federal Parliament this issue will be addressed and a law will be made to make this an offence.

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The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Phil McNeely: I thank the Attorney General for that answer. I'm happy to hear of this government's continued commitment to amend the Criminal Code in order to make it an offence to distribute non-consensual images. I know that taking action on this issue is a vital step in upholding this government's commitment to ensure our children are able to thrive in schools and communities that are safe, inclusive and accepting.

I understand that the Coordinating Committee of Senior Officials—CCSO—Cybercrime Working Group released a report along with recommendations on cyberbullying. Could the Attorney General please comment on the findings of the report?

Hon. John Gerretsen: He's quite correct. The co-ordinating committee is a committee of senior officials in all the various ministries of the Attorney General around this country. They've been working very diligently on behalf of the federal-provincial-territorial organization to deal with this issue. They've come up with a report that recommends that a new criminal offence be developed in order to address this issue in the Criminal Code. I intend to take up this issue with the federal Attorney General, the new Attorney General, Peter MacKay, as well, within the near future.

We hope that the federal Parliament will deal with this issue this year. I think it has support of all members of the federal House as well. It should be dealt with. It's all about protecting our children, especially in light of the tragic events that have occurred in various parts of this country over the last number of years. So hopefully a bill will be passed federally so that we can deal with this issue once and for all.

ARBITRATION

Mr. Steve Clark: My question is to the Premier. Premier, it has been three weeks since the Association of Municipalities of Ontario conference, where municipal leaders told you loud and clear that Ontario's broken arbitration system must be fixed. Their beleaguered taxpayers can't afford a system awarding contracts that

ignore the economic realities in communities like Scugog, where firefighters received a 26.7% increase. It's the top priority for municipalities. Given the urgency, I actually expected that you would table an arbitration reform bill yesterday, on the first day that we're back in the Legislature. But just as you did when you voted against our capacity to pay act last spring, you've let our municipal partners down.

Premier, can you tell me and mayors from small and large communities, communities in every corner of our province, why arbitration reform isn't a priority for you?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Labour.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: I thank the member opposite for asking this very important question, an issue that I've been engaged in conversations with our municipal leaders as well all through the summer and especially at the AMO. It's important that we remember some important information that will be helpful for all members as we try a path forward on this important issue.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Renfrew, come to order.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: For the most part, the system that is in place has worked, with 97% of agreements being reached without any labour disruption. I think it's very important to remember that. We know that the majority of police and firefighter agreements are reached at the bargaining table without ever going to arbitration. That's something I think is important. We need to make sure that conditions for fair bargaining are always there at the table, where municipalities and first responders are able to negotiate an agreement and provide those vital services for our communities.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Steve Clark: I'm sorry, Premier, and I'm sorry, Minister; that's not good enough. It's actions, not words, that count. We don't need another conversation; we need to get to work. Ontario PCs put a solution on the table in Bill 44 last spring. We handed AMO the pen, and that bill contained everything that they wanted, but you teamed up with the NDP to defeat AMO's bill. Our House leader, Mr. Wilson, has committed that if you bring forward a bill with the reforms contained in Bill 44, we'll support it. That's the arbitration bill that AMO and mayors wanted. So I ask again: Will you make it happen?

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Selective memory is something that I think we all suffer in this House once in a while. I do want to remind this member that last spring, in 2012, when we brought some very specific reforms to the interest arbitration system to make it timely, fair and transparent, that party, the opposition party, teamed with the NDP and voted down those reforms. If those reforms would have been in place today, a lot of the issues they are raising would have disappeared by now.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Member from Simcoe-Grey, come to order.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: We want to move forward. We want to make sure that we are working very closely with

AMO and fire and police. We are bringing them together around the table so that we can have some healthy conversation so we can determine the right set of reforms that we can develop together and present to this House in the future.

HYDRO CHARGES

Ms. Sarah Campbell: My question is for the Minister of Energy. For more than a decade consumers across this province have felt sticker shock after signing expensive long-term energy contracts with energy retailers. Last week, it was announced that the global adjustment, which is added to consumers' bills, will double to 8.72 cents per kilowatt hour. This means that families that are already feeling cheated by the shady tactics of these companies will be paying roughly 15 cents to 17 cents per kilowatt hour 24 hours a day, nearly one third more than the peak price being charged to other consumers by Hydro One.

My question is simple: What steps will you take to help consumers?

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: Mr. Speaker, the government of Ontario is very cognizant of pressures on the electricity rates across the province, but we've taken a number of very significant steps to protect families across the province. We've also got some very special considerations for people in the northern part of the province. The clean energy benefit generates a 10% discount off the bottom line of families' electricity bills across the province of Ontario. We actually have, as well, a northern Ontario tax credit to assist people who have challenges meeting their electricity bills.

We are cognizant of the pressures. We've taken steps. We're going to keep those programs in place, Mr. Speaker, and we'll go forward on that basis.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Sarah Campbell: Minister, electricity prices are high enough for those of us paying the market rate, but for those who are stuck with energy retailers, this really could be the straw that breaks the camel's back. The government has made changes but the companies have just found new ways to break the rules. I've seen deceased customers signed up, house guests unwittingly sign up their hosts, and even an Ontario Works administrator sign up dozens of her clients. This needs to stop.

Will the minister finally take the side of vulnerable consumers and put an end to the exploitative practices of energy retailers?

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: Minister of consumer affairs.

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: I want to thank the member for the question. I'm always interested in hearing more about how we can protect consumers in Ontario.

I've actually been in discussions with the Minister of Energy about fair pricing for consumers and fair consumer practices so that consumers know their rights and that they know exactly what they're purchasing.

I think we have a strong record in Ontario of fair market practices in this area, but as I said, I'm always open

to hearing more suggestions and happy to talk to the member further.

GROWTH PLANNING

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: I've got a question this morning for the Minister of Northern Development and Mines. In my riding of Oakville, our constituents are starting to see the real benefits of a growth plan for the greater Golden Horseshoe. By implementing this growth plan, the province is creating conditions that bring a strong economy and a healthy environment.

Now, I know the challenges we face in the greater Golden Horseshoe are much different from those that are faced by Ontarians who live in northern Ontario. Last month at AMO I had the opportunity to engage with northern mayors, and we talked about the growth plan for the northern Ontario area.

Will the minister please inform the House how government is working with northerners to ensure the successful implementation of a growth plan specifically for northern Ontario?

Hon. Michael Gravelle: I want to thank the member for Oakville for the question and also for joining us last month at AMO in discussions with our northern mayors.

There's no question, Mr. Speaker, that certainly the government, under Premier Wynne, wants to continue to ensure that our northern communities remain on a positive track toward prosperity and growth. When the Premier was in Thunder Bay last week, we had a great jobs round table with our leadership, talking about growth plan priorities, and certainly the engagement of our northern mayors and stakeholders is absolutely crucial. We're going to continue to work to increase regional capacity-building. That's hugely important in terms of the investment opportunities.

Specifically in terms of the investments we have made related to the growth plan, annual funding of \$100 million in the Northern Ontario Heritage Fund to support projects that create jobs and investment has been crucial. Certainly we have a regional economic opportunities partnership initiative that will be supporting collaboration between communities by providing enhanced funding to partnership proposals. We've also got the creation of the independent not-for-profit Northern Policy Institute, something that northerners called for and that became part of our growth plan implementation, as well as a multi-modal transportation strategy, which is hugely important and crucial, particularly as we work to maintain a sustainable and efficient Ontario Northland Transportation Commission.

We're very grateful for the opportunities we have to increase prosperity in northern Ontario.

MEMBERS' PRIVILEGES

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member for Timmins–James Bay on a point of order.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Speaker, earlier in question period, my leader was asking a question to the Premier in regards

to expanding the scope of committee. I want to make this point: At no time in that question was she calling into question your decision of yesterday, your decision in regard to what you were deciding in regard to the discussions you had with Mr. Gene or the subject of your discussion yesterday.

It is within the purview of this House and within the purview of the standing orders by which the committees have power—the committees are able to sit and do the things that they do because they're in the standing orders, but this House has the authority to expand the scope of the committee. That falls within our right as members, and I just want to put you on notice—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): You don't need to put me on notice, because—I will explain clearly to the member, because he rose when he shouldn't have risen. The matter of the alleged intimidation of the Speaker had been dealt with. My perception was that the leader of the third party was going there, and I asked her—

Mr. Gilles Bisson: No.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): You can say no all you want. I had a perception, as Speaker, that the member was going there. I asked her to change or modify her question, which she did, and I'm thankful that she did do that, and that's the point at which I stopped her to do it. You do not need to put me on notice, because I made the perception that she was going down a road that was already ruled on. So I'll leave it at that.

VISITOR

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member for Nepean–Carleton on a point of order.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Mr. Speaker, I do notice that my friend has left the gallery, but Ed Sem is visiting from British Columbia. He is a former colleague of mine; we worked for Joe Clark many years ago—second time around, not the first.

DEFERRED VOTES

STRONGER PROTECTION FOR ONTARIO CONSUMERS ACT, 2013

LOI DE 2013 RENFORÇANT LA PROTECTION DU CONSOMMATEUR ONTARIEN

Deferred vote on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 55, An Act to amend the Collection Agencies Act, the Consumer Protection Act, 2002 and the Real Estate and Business Brokers Act, 2002 and to make consequential amendments to other Acts / Projet de loi 55, Loi modifiant la Loi sur les agences de recouvrement, la Loi de 2002 sur la protection du consommateur et la Loi de 2002 sur le courtage commercial et immobilier et apportant des modifications corrélatives à d'autres lois.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Call in the members. This will be a five-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1143 to 1148.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): On April 23, Ms. MacCharles moved second reading of Bill 55. All those in favour, please rise one at a time to be recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

Albanese, Laura	Hardeman, Ernie	Milloy, John
Armstrong, Teresa J.	Harris, Michael	Mordi, Reza
Arnett, Ted	Hatfield, Percy	Munro, Julia
Bailey, Robert	Hillier, Randy	Murray, Glen R.
Balkissoon, Bas	Horwath, Andrea	Naqvi, Yasir
Bartolucci, Rick	Hoskins, Eric	Natyshak, Taras
Berardinetti, Lorenzo	Hudak, Tim	Nicholls, Rick
Bisson, Gilles	Hunter, Mitzie Jacquelin	O'Toole, John
Bradley, James J.	Jackson, Rod	Orazietti, David
Campbell, Sarah	Jaczek, Helena	Ouellette, Jerry J.
Chan, Michael	Jeffrey, Linda	Pettapiece, Randy
Chiarelli, Bob	Jones, Sylvia	Piruzza, Teresa
Chudleigh, Ted	Klees, Frank	Qaadri, Shafiq
Clark, Steve	Kwinter, Monte	Sandals, Liz
Coteau, Michael	Leal, Jeff	Sattler, Peggy
Crack, Grant	Leone, Rob	Schein, Jonah
Damerla, Dipika	MacCharles, Tracy	Scott, Laurie
Del Duca, Steven	MacLaren, Jack	Sergio, Mario
Delaney, Bob	MacLeod, Lisa	Singh, Jagmeet
Dhillon, Vic	Mangat, Amrit	Smith, Todd
Dickson, Joe	Mantha, Michael	Sousa, Charles
DiNovo, Cheri	Marchese, Rosario	Tabuns, Peter
Duguid, Brad	Matthews, Deborah	Taylor, Monique
Dunlop, Garfield	Mauro, Bill	Thompson, Lisa M.
Elliott, Christine	McDonnell, Jim	Vanthof, John
Fife, Catherine	McKenna, Jane	Walker, Bill
Flynn, Kevin Daniel	McMeekin, Ted	Wilson, Jim
Forster, Cindy	McNaughton, Monte	Wong, Soo
Fraser, John	McNeely, Phil	Wynne, Kathleen O.
Gerretsen, John	Meilleur, Madeleine	Yakabuski, John
Gélinas, France	Miller, Norm	Yurek, Jeff
Gravelle, Michael	Miller, Paul	Zimmer, David

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): All those opposed, please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller):

The ayes are 96; the nays are 0.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I declare the motion carried.

Second reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Shall the bill be ordered for third reading? Ms. MacCharles.

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: Speaker, I would ask that the bill be referred to the Standing Committee on the Legislative Assembly.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Agreed? Agreed. So ordered.

There are no further deferred votes. This House stands adjourned until 3 p.m. this afternoon.

The House recessed from 1152 to 1500.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

WIND TURBINES

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: I rise today to make the Ministers of Energy, Health and Long-Term Care as well

as Environment aware of what is happening in Port Elgin, a community that is home to an industrial wind turbine owned by the CAW. Because the approvals for this turbine began and were given prior to the Green Energy Act, there are 117 homes within 550 metres, and there are some that live as close as 200 metres from the turbine.

On August 26, six families were at the Saugeen Shores council meeting to detail their health and property-value agonies since the turbine began operation. Council passed a motion detailing their documented, reported negative health impacts and demanded that CAW shut down their turbine. It operates as a violation to the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms of citizens' health and property enjoyment. I have to tell you that when you hear the mayor of Saugeen Shores talk about the tears of distinguished and well-respected citizens that were shared that evening, people have to wake up and finally get off their power trip and do what's right.

Doug Gowanlock, vice-deputy mayor of Saugeen Shores, committed to pursue the regulation of low-frequency emissions, while this Liberal government refuses to do the same.

The CAW refuses to communicate with the impacted citizens.

This government refuses to listen to impacted citizens across this province. It's time that this government accepts the Green Energy Act as failed and does right by Ontario.

EVENTS IN PARKDALE-HIGH PARK

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: It's a pleasure to rise in this House and to invite all my colleagues and everyone out there in Ontario to some incredible festivals that are happening this weekend in Parkdale-High Park. Number one, the Ukrainian festival takes over all of Bloor West and Bloor West shuts down. Number two, the Polish festival takes over all of Roncesvalles and Roncesvalles shuts down. Wonderful fun.

Also, on a more serious note, there's a barbecue happening at Runnymede Collegiate called Neighbours United for Inclusion. These are the two gay women who had their house attacked with homophobic messages and had their tires slashed. Everyone is coming together to offer their support. That's going to be a barbecue going from about 11:30 till about 3 p.m.

On a final note, I want to welcome everybody back. I know we've all welcomed our new members, but I want to welcome all of our older members as well. I know that we engage in partisan warfare in this place, but none of us really want a one-party state. So just to acknowledge all of our gifts, all that we bring, the hard work that I know everyone does—I don't know any one of you who works under 60 hours a week. So thank you for what you do in service to the people of Ontario, to your constituents, and thank you so much for everything. Welcome back.

TOUR FOR HUMANITY

Mr. Mike Colle: I'm pleased to welcome the Friends of Simon Wiesenthal Center for Holocaust Studies to Queen's Park today for a reception in honour of Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish New Year. Happy new year to everybody.

The Friends of Simon Wiesenthal Center is a leader in promoting tolerance and education. Their new initiative is called the Tour for Humanity. It is a mobile tolerance centre designed to spread the message of tolerance, acceptance, peace and inclusivity. The Tour for Humanity bus will be travelling to even the most remote communities in Ontario to reach students, educators, law enforcement officers and community leaders.

I invite each member of the Legislature to join us today at 5:30 to visit the Tour for Humanity mobile tolerance education centre on the south driveway at 5:30 and then afterwards join us all in the legislative dining room downstairs for a L'Chayim toast for a sweet and happy new year for all Ontarians.

We have to wish all of our incredible citizens of the Jewish faith, who have been in Ontario for over 200 years, a very healthy and prosperous new year for all their loved ones. I say to all of them, Shana Tova.

WIND TURBINES

Mr. Bill Walker: Enough is enough. This government must respect the wishes of the residents in rural municipalities and support an immediate halt on any further installation of industrial wind turbines in this province.

Recently, two counties and eight municipalities in my riding of Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound declared themselves as unwilling hosts to wind turbine development. They are: Bruce county, Grey county, Arran-Elderslie, Northern Bruce Peninsula, South Bruce Peninsula, Chatsworth, Georgian Bluffs, Grey Highlands, Meaford and West Grey. They are part of a growing chorus of municipal leaders who have declared their communities unwilling hosts. Likewise, all of them have previously passed resolutions in favour of implementing an immediate freeze on the development of industrial wind turbines in Ontario. The residents and municipal leaders in my riding share a mutual understanding that wind turbines have a negative impact on the residents' health and the economic well-being of their communities.

Mr. Speaker, Premier Wynne explicitly promised she would not impose any wind project on any community that did not want it. She now has to cede planning control to local governments over whether or not new wind projects will go in their communities. Honouring that promise is her moral imperative. Our PC Party brought the moratorium vote to the floor of the Legislature on at least six occasions, but the Liberals and NDP members voted it down each time.

The wind turbines situated so close to people's homes pose serious health problems, evidenced by the Bruce

Grey public health unit's recent study that concurred with these long-standing concerns.

In Ontario, there are 64 municipalities who have declared themselves unwilling wind turbine hosts and 100 municipalities who have voted in favour of an immediate wind moratorium. We are urging her and her government to accept the municipalities' veto vote and respect that no means no.

NORTHERN ONTARIO

Ms. Sarah Campbell: During the summer break, I spent my time speaking to constituents across my riding about issues that are important to them. While people in northwestern Ontario are happy with their recent victories to keep the Experimental Lakes Area open, reduce auto insurance premiums and see that much-needed investments are made in health care, they believe that much more needs to be done.

While the cost of auto insurance will go down, the price of hydro continues to rise. It's leaving seniors and hard-working families across the north fearful when they enter the winter months because they will be dreading those hydro bills that come along with the cold weather.

Communities across the northwest are waiting for this government to live up to its commitment on jobs and to make real investments in the Ring of Fire, including a long-term energy strategy that will allow our businesses to thrive and compete.

Most importantly, seniors who have seen their pensions gutted, families that are struggling to put food on the table and those looking for work are worried about the price of essential goods in their region, including the gasoline and hydro prices that may increase again to fund the Metrolinx transit strategy in the greater Toronto and Hamilton area.

Speaker, northerners are tapped out. It's time for the Premier to come forward with her transit plan and to assure northerners that we will not see a spike in the HST or the price of gasoline.

KRISHNA JANMASHTAMI

Mrs. Amrit Mangat: On August 29, 2013, I had the pleasure to attend the birthday celebration of Lord Krishna, an auspicious and special occasion for Hindus called Janmashtami. It was held at the residence of Naval Bajaj, president of the Indo-Canada Chamber of Commerce. There were about 200 attendees, and many of them were my constituents.

Hindus consider Lord Krishna their leader, philosopher and teacher who narrated the Bhagavad-Gita in about 3200 BC. Hindus celebrate this occasion with great pomp and show: hymns, songs, dances and ringing of bells.

Krishna Janmashtami at the Bajaj residence was truly an occasion to celebrate Ontario's diversity. I want to thank Rashi and Naval Bajaj for hosting this wonderful event at their home.

I have said it many times before and I would like to reiterate it again: I'm proud to be part of a government that encourages its citizens to protect and promote their religion, culture and heritage.

1510

BEER AND WINE SALES

Mr. Todd Smith: As the representative of Ontario's fastest-growing wine region, Prince Edward county, I can't express this more clearly: We need to improve the access to market for Ontario-grown and Ontario-produced products.

Our craft brewers and our wineries create jobs here in Ontario. They create jobs not only in the alcohol sector, but also in agriculture.

Ontario barley, Ontario grains and Ontario grapes end up on shelves in the LCBO, but if it's a holiday weekend, the average Ontarian is going to have a hard time getting their hands on them; however, in rural Ontario, you might be able to. Agency stores like those in Coneston, Thamesford or Craigleith are able to stay open on Labour Day and Canada Day to supply Ontarians whose neighbours have decided to stage an impromptu barbecue. These agency stores are another link in the jobs chain that starts in our fields, goes through our wineries and breweries, and then onto our store shelves.

In this House, we hear a lot about how we need to create jobs and grow our economy. We in the PC Party are actually committed to doing it. That's why last year we put out a policy proposal to allow the sale of beer and wine in corner stores, and yesterday at the Toronto Region Board of Trade, Mac's announced that if Ontario did that, it was prepared to invest \$55 million and open 27 new stores. With the stroke of a pen, Ontario could create hundreds of jobs and bring millions of dollars of economic activity to life. With the stroke of a pen, we would bring Ontario into the 21st century. We need some real action to create jobs, and this would create jobs in agriculture, manufacturing and the service sector, which would benefit all Ontarians.

CULTURAL DIVERSITY

Ms. Soo Wong: Earlier today, I was very pleased to join my colleague the member from York Centre as he announced that he would be bringing forward a motion about the importance of diversity in our province. I know that my riding of Scarborough-Agincourt is more vibrant and more prosperous because of the diversity we celebrate. So I'd like to commend my colleague from York Centre for bringing this issue forward to the House shortly.

Mr. Speaker, there are many organizations that work to preserve different cultures and promote diversity in our community. One such group is the Canadian African Caribbean Unsung Heroes Committee. This committee works to create awareness of the outstanding achievements and contributions of people of African and

Caribbean descent. This November, they will be hosting the third annual Unsung Heroes awards.

I'm thrilled to rise this afternoon to recognize one of the 2013 Unsung Heroes youth award recipients, Akehil Johnson. I've known Akehil for many years as a very dedicated volunteer in Scarborough-Agincourt. He has worked tirelessly on efforts to prevent impaired driving, promote youth empowerment, improve literacy and computer literacy, as well as a camp counsellor for some of the less fortunate families in our community. I know Akehil as a compassionate and intellectual young man who is willing to lend a helping hand to those worthy causes.

I'd like to congratulate Akehil Johnson, a very deserving recipient of the 2013 Unsung Heroes award, and express my congratulations and thanks to the Canadian African Caribbean Unsung Heroes Committee for all the great work they do in our community.

FETAL ALCOHOL SPECTRUM DISORDER

Mr. Jeff Yurek: I'd like to take this time to recognize the efforts of some very passionate and dedicated members of my community for organizing our annual Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder Awareness Day in St. Thomas.

Approximately nine out of 1,000 babies born in Canada are affected by FASD. The disorder can include physical disabilities, brain and central nervous system impairments, and behavioural or learning challenges.

Undiagnosed FASD creates problems for our children in school and can lead to other social hardships such as mental illness, criminal behaviour, homelessness and substance abuse later in life. However, the lack of a coordinated awareness, prevention and treatment strategy from our government means many FASD sufferers must cope in silence.

On Monday, September 9, yesterday, community members gathered together at city hall in St. Thomas and across the province to raise awareness of this preventable condition.

I want to thank the members of our local organizing committee, including Ethel de la Penotiere, for their commitment to preventing FASD and helping those who must deal with it every day.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I thank all members for their statements.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT AGENCIES

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I beg to inform the House that today the Clerk received a report on intended appointments dated September 10, 2013, from the

Standing Committee on Government Agencies. Pursuant to standing order 108(f)(9), the report is deemed to be adopted by the House.

Report deemed adopted.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

NATURAL GAS SUPERHIGHWAY ACT, 2013 LOI DE 2013 SUR L'AUTOROUTE DU GAZ NATUREL

Mr. Bailey moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 97, An Act to encourage the purchase of vehicles that use natural gas as a fuel / Projet de loi 97, Loi visant à encourager l'achat de véhicules utilisant du gaz naturel comme carburant.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member for a short statement.

Mr. Robert Bailey: This bill amends the Highway Traffic Act and the Taxation Act, 2007.

Part VIII of the Highway Traffic Act currently sets out weight limits for vehicles. A new section of the act enables the Lieutenant Governor in Council to make regulations prescribing different weight limits for vehicles that use liquefied natural gas as a fuel. The Minister of Transportation is required to table a progress report in the Legislative Assembly every year until a regulation is made.

The Taxation Act, 2007, is amended to provide for a non-refundable tax credit to taxpayers who purchase certain vehicles that use natural gas as a fuel. The tax credit would be equal to half of the Ontario portion of the HST that the taxpayer paid for the vehicle. To qualify, the HST on the vehicle must be paid within a period of seven taxation years, beginning with the first taxation year that ends after this bill receives royal assent. Any unused tax credits in the taxation year may be carried forward and deducted in the following five years.

MOTIONS

HOUSE Sittings

Hon. John Gerretsen: On this beautiful late summer afternoon, I'd like to believe that we have unanimous consent to put forward a motion without notice regarding the House schedule.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Do we have unanimous consent? Agreed? Agreed.

Hon. John Gerretsen: I move that, following oral questions or deferred votes, as the case may be, on Monday, September 16, 2013, the Speaker shall adjourn

the House without motion, and the House shall stand adjourned until Wednesday, September 18, 2013; and

That no committees shall meet on either September 16 or 17, 2013.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Do we have an agreement? Agreed? Agreed.

Motion agreed to.

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

WORLD SUICIDE PREVENTION DAY

Hon. Teresa Piruzza: As many of my colleagues in this House know, one in five young people in Ontario are dealing with mental health challenges.

We know that 70% of mental health challenges begin in childhood or adolescence, and if left untreated, they become more serious and more difficult to treat. We also know that too many young people attempt suicide. It may be surprising to know that Canada has the third-highest youth suicide rate in the industrialized world.

It is in this sober context that I'm proud to highlight the steps our government is taking to help young people with mental health challenges, specifically those in crisis. It is my hope that today, on World Suicide Prevention Day, we give the issue of youth suicide the attention it warrants.

Mr. Speaker, we want young people in crisis to know there is immediate help close by. That premise—delivering the support that kids need when they need it and as close to home as possible—is also the central theme of our Comprehensive Mental Health and Addictions Strategy. It was announced in 2011 and focuses on children and youth for the first three years.

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Two years later, our efforts are making a real difference. Approximately 35,000 more children and youth, and their families, are benefiting from support and services. These supports are being provided by 770 new mental health workers. Of these, 260 are helping kids in community agencies close to home, 175 are helping students in schools, 80 aboriginal workers are providing services to children in high-needs communities, 21 mental health court workers are helping to keep youth out of the justice system, and 144 nurses are working in schools. These workers are having a real impact on communities across the province.

An area I particularly want to bring attention to is suicide among aboriginal youth. This is an area this government is very concerned about, and we are determined to be a part of the solution. The 80 new aboriginal workers I mentioned will help high-needs communities provide additional direct and culturally appropriate services to 4,000 more aboriginal children and youth each year. Our government will also develop and implement training supports for aboriginal mental health

and addictions workers, to increase the supply of trained workers in communities.

Another important focus of our government's plan is to increase access to mental health services for the province's rural, remote and underserviced communities. I'm also pleased that Ontario is enhancing its tele-psychiatry model so an additional 800 children and youth in these areas can have access to mental health consultations and expertise through video conferencing. Starting this fall, all professionals providing mental health services to children and youth can refer them to the new service.

We need to continue to sustain the momentum we have built. We're working in communities across the province with our partners in schools and the health and post-secondary sectors. We're doing this so we can continue transforming and improving the child and youth mental health system. While we are proud of all of the achievements we have made in communities across Ontario, we know there is more work to do. We will continue working diligently with all of our partners to help all young people in Ontario enjoy the bright futures they deserve.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Responses?

Mrs. Christine Elliott: I am honoured to rise today on behalf of the PC caucus to raise awareness and to speak about World Suicide Prevention Day. The International Association for Suicide Prevention, the World Health Organization, as well as the World Federation for Mental Health, continue to promote and raise awareness of World Suicide Prevention Day; last year, over 40 countries participated in the day.

Almost all of us, in our lifetimes, will be affected by suicide or know someone who has lost a loved one to suicide. Unfortunately, suicide still continues to carry a stigma, which makes it very difficult for people to talk about it. The Ontario PC Party wants to raise awareness of this very serious issue and to ensure that assistance is given to prevent these tragedies.

It seems that every week we hear of another suicide in our communities. Heartbreaking stories about teenagers who are being bullied at school or individuals with a mental illness who feel that they have no other alternative but suicide fill the media weekly. In Canada, there is an average of 4,000 deaths by suicide every year, making suicide the 11th-leading cause of death for Canadians.

In Ontario, there are roughly three suicides per day. Certain groups, as the minister mentioned, are also more susceptible to suicide than others. First Nation communities have higher suicide rates than the rest of Canada. Youth, the elderly, inmates in correctional facilities and those living with mental illness are also more likely to attempt suicide.

Tragically, suicide is the second-leading cause of death for youth between the ages of 10 to 24. Teens who have been the victims of bullying and those who suffer from depression are at a greater risk of attempting suicide or considering it as an option.

Vulnerable individuals are also at a higher risk of suicide. Statistics show that over 90% of suicide victims

have a diagnosable psychiatric illness. Major depression and bipolar disorder account for roughly 25% of all deaths by suicide.

Clearly, as the minister said, there is much work that remains to be done. We need to make sure that we get prompt treatment for those people with mental illnesses, and we need to work towards eliminating the stigma associated with mental health so that, at some point, we will see mental health as being equally important in being treated as physical health.

Now, the minister mentioned the mental health strategy that was implemented by the government, and I do commend them for commencing the strategy. It is great that we are doing more to diagnose young people with mental illness and to provide treatment for them. The diagnosis part of it is working very well, but I would urge the government to really look at putting more resources into the actual treatment, because we still have youth that are waiting on lists up to two years for treatment. Clearly, we've heard from families—I think everyone in this Legislature has heard from families—that when you're dealing with a teenager who is in crisis, you can't wait two years for treatment. So I think we're all working towards the same goal and we certainly stand ready to work with the government on this important initiative.

Finally, I would just like to say that in my own local community I would commend the great work that's being done by Distress Centre Durham, who have been providing residents of my riding with an opportunity to get help when suicide seems like the only option. In fact, I know that over this past weekend they had a walk to raise funds for the important work that they're doing, as I know many organizations across Ontario have been doing.

So I would just like to say to all of the staff, to all of the volunteers and all the people that support these organizations and groups, thank you very much for all of the work that you're doing in our communities. Please know that, in doing so, you are saving lives. Thank you.

Miss Monique Taylor: I'm honoured to stand in my place today speaking on behalf of the NDP caucus and adding my voice in support of World Suicide Prevention Day. I'm honoured to have the privilege of this platform to speak about something that we as a society and as individuals do not discuss enough.

The theme for this year's World Suicide Prevention Day is "Stigma," the stigma attached to mental health and suicide, which is a major barrier to suicide prevention. But by speaking about it, by being willing to overcome our initial discomfort and by opening ourselves so that others may find it easier to speak to us, we can start to break down that barrier. We can start to gain some insight and have a better understanding of just what a person who is thinking of suicide is dealing with. But more importantly, we can open doors for those people to help them find and feel comfortable seeking the help that they need without the burden of stigma.

The Suicide Prevention Community Council of Hamilton has shared some startling figures with me. In

Hamilton alone, someone dies by suicide every nine days. Around the world, approximately one million people die every year from suicide. That's one every 40 seconds—more than the number that are lost due to homicide and war combined.

As the NDP critic for children and youth services, I'm well aware of the particular problem of suicide among our youth. We have all heard the tragic, heartbreakng stories of young people who have ended their own lives, often as a result of bullying, and particularly, in this age of immediate mass communication, bullying that is done online. But we must be equally aware of the fact that these are not isolated cases. In fact, suicide is the second-leading cause of death among Canadians between the ages of 15 and 24. So we have some different figures there but the numbers, regardless, speak for themselves.

On this day, as we speak about suicide prevention, it is impossible not to talk about the plight of our First Nations, because First Nation communities are particularly vulnerable, with suicide rates for youth being five to seven times greater than those for non-aboriginal youth. These communities are dealing with many complex issues, including the lack of access to basic health or mental health services. The plague of addictions and pain in too many First Nation communities is well documented. These factors result in what can only be described as a catastrophic level of suicide. We have seen coroner's inquests, states of emergency declared, and endless newspaper articles, all calling for urgent and real action. Today, let's remember the work that we need to do to address these horrific statistics and the real people who are suffering by our inaction.

1530

I stand here as one voice, but it is a voice that has the privilege to speak in this House, a privilege that is not shared by the vast majority who have been affected, who are affected and will be affected by suicide. With that privilege comes an added responsibility—a responsibility, in this case, to promote the open discussion of mental health and suicide.

Ignorance is one of the causes of stigma, and open discussion can only help in that regard.

With events and conversations happening in communities all across this province, I encourage all members to do what they can to promote these activities.

A large proportion of people who die by suicide suffer from mental illness. The Centre for Addiction and Mental Health estimates that 90% suffered from at least one mental health disorder.

The fact is that the stigma associated with mental health, in many, many cases, stops people from seeking the help they need. They feel alone in their struggle, unable to cope. Only one in three people will seek help for symptoms of mental illness because of the fear of stigma.

As I said earlier, it's a privilege to speak here, and it gives us that added responsibility. But we all have an added responsibility to understand and to share with

others that mental illness is a real medical illness and not a character flaw.

As you can see, Mr. Speaker, we could all go on for an endless time here, but I'm happy that I had the privilege to be able to speak to this very important matter.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I thank all members for their comments.

PETITIONS

HOSPITAL PARKING FEES

Mr. John O'Toole: I'm pleased to present a petition on behalf of my constituents in the riding of Durham. It reads as follows:

"Whereas thousands of Ontarians have expressed concerns over the high costs of parking at hospitals in Ontario and cannot afford these extra fees; and

"Whereas Dr. Rajendra Kale, the Canadian Medical Association Journal's interim editor-in-chief, stated that patients are having to cut doctor's appointments short so they don't have to pay for another hour of parking;

"Whereas the Canadian Medical Association Journal has said in an editorial that parking fees are a barrier to health care and add additional stress to patients, who have enough to deal with;

"Therefore, we the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That Ontario's members of provincial Parliament, and the provincial government, take action to abolish parking fees for all seniors when visiting hospitals."

I'm pleased to sign it and support it on behalf of my constituents.

TAXATION

Ms. Sarah Campbell: "Whereas the cost of living in northwestern Ontario is significantly higher than other regions of the province due to the high cost of necessities such as hydro, home heating fuel, gasoline and auto insurance; and

"Whereas an increase in the price of any of these essential goods will make it even more difficult for people living in northwestern Ontario to pay their bills and put food on the table;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To reject any proposed increase to the harmonized sales tax, gas tax or any other fees or taxes in the northwest; and instead investigate other means such as increasing corporate tax compliance or eliminating corporate tax loopholes in order to fund transit in the greater Toronto and Hamilton area."

I support this and will affix my signature and give it to Aly to deliver to the table.

PUBLIC TRANSIT

Ms. Soo Wong: I have a petition from my riding of Scarborough—Agincourt addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“Whereas Scarborough residents north of Ontario Highway 401 and east of Don Mills are without a rapid transit option; and

“Whereas a strong transit system is critical for increasing economic development and tackling income disparity; and

“Whereas this geographical area continues to grow and the demand for strong rapid transit continues to increase; and

“Whereas Sheppard Avenue is a major artery for automobile traffic for commuters travelling from suburbs to downtown Toronto, and travelling from suburb to suburb; and

“Whereas ground-level rapid transit would increase traffic, restrict lanes for automobiles, and add further risk for pedestrians and commuters at dangerous intersections along Sheppard Avenue; and

“Whereas demands for underground rapid transit along Sheppard Avenue have been part of public discourse for over 50 years; and

“Whereas the province of Ontario previously approved a plan from the city of Toronto to extend the Sheppard subway line from Downsview to Scarborough Centre; and

“Whereas an extension to the Sheppard subway line will require contributions and co-operation from the city of Toronto, the province of Ontario and the government of Canada;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“To support the extension of the Sheppard subway line east to Scarborough Centre; and

“To call upon all levels of government to contribute multi-year funding for the construction and operation of an extension to the Sheppard subway line.”

Madam Speaker, I fully support the petition and give it to Erica.

SHALE BEACH

Mr. Jim Wilson: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the Ministry of Transportation closed public access to Shale Beach off Highway 26 in the town of Blue Mountains suddenly and with no consultation; and

“Whereas the closure will impact fisherman, swimmers and visitors who have been frequenting the beach for generations with no problem; and

“Whereas the closure will remove one of the only wheelchair-accessible fishing locations in the area; and

“Whereas the McGuinty-Wynne Liberal government won’t let Ontarians enjoy anything for free anymore without implementing a new tax or a new fee; and

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“That Premier Kathleen Wynne and the Minister of Transportation immediately restore access to Shale Beach so that residents can continue to enjoy the beach and all that it has to offer for generations to come.”

Madam Speaker, I certainly agree with this petition, and I will sign it.

MINING INDUSTRY

Mr. John Vanthof: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas Ontario’s mineral wealth belongs to the people of Ontario;

“Whereas the people who collectively own these natural resources should stand to enjoy their benefits;

“Whereas Ontario’s Mining Act presently calls for resources mined in Ontario to be processed in Canada, yet allows cabinet to grant” exemptions “to the clause;

“Whereas these” exemptions “ensure residents of Ontario are told why our resources are being shipped elsewhere—information that can be used to better plan for infrastructure and job training needs to ensure a more competitive environment;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“To amend the Mining Act to ensure that people living in Ontario maximize the benefit of their natural resources.”

I fully agree. I sign my signature and give it to page Aly.

FAMILY CAREGIVER LEAVE

Ms. Soo Wong: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“Whereas the people of Ontario deserve to be able to look after their sick or injured family members without fearing that they will lose their jobs at such a vulnerable time;

“Whereas the people of Ontario deserve to be able to spend time looking for a child that has disappeared, or take time off to grieve the death of a child that was murdered without fearing that they will lose their jobs; and

“Whereas the federal government has recently extended similar leaves and economic supports to federal employees;

“Whereas the government of Ontario, and the Premier of Ontario, support Ontario families and wish to foster mental and physical well-being by allowing those closest to sick or injured family members the time to provide support free of work-related concerns; and

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“That the Legislative Assembly of Ontario pass and enact, during” the spring session—now, look; we’re doing fall of 2013—“Bill 21, the Leaves to Help Families Act.”

Madam Speaker, I fully support it and give it to Ravicha, the page.

MARKDALE HOSPITAL

Mr. Bill Walker: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas Grey Bruce Health Services' Markdale hospital is the only health care facility between Owen Sound and Orangeville on the Highway 10 corridor;

"Whereas the community of Markdale rallied to raise \$13 million on the promise they would get a new state-of-the-art hospital in Markdale;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care announce as soon as possible its intended construction date for the new Markdale hospital and ensure that the care needs of the patients and families of our community are met in a timely manner."

I support this petition, will sign it and send it with page Erica.

HYDRO RATES

Ms. Sarah Campbell: "Whereas home heating and electricity are essential utilities for northern families;

"Whereas the government has a duty and an obligation to ensure that essential goods and services are affordable for all families living in the north and across the province;

"Whereas government policy such as the Green Energy Act, the harmonized sales tax, cancellation of gas plants in Oakville and Mississauga have caused the price of electricity to artificially increase to the point it is no longer affordable for families or small business;

"Whereas electricity generated and used in north-western Ontario is among the cleanest and cheapest to produce in Canada, yet has been inflated by government policy;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To take immediate steps to reduce the price of electricity in the northwest and ensure that residents and businesses have access to energy that properly reflects the price of local generation."

I wholeheartedly support this, will sign my name and give this to page Megan to deliver to the table.

1540

PUBLIC TRANSIT

Ms. Soo Wong: I have a petition for the Sheppard East subway extension:

"Whereas Scarborough residents north of Ontario Highway 401 and east of Don Mills are without a rapid transit option; and

"Whereas a strong transit system is critical for increasing economic development and tackling income disparity; and

"Whereas this geographical area continues to grow and the demand for strong rapid transit continues to increase; and

"Whereas Sheppard Avenue is a major artery for automobile traffic for commuters travelling from suburbs to downtown Toronto, and travelling from suburb to suburb; and

"Whereas ground-level rapid transit would increase traffic, restrict lanes for automobiles, and add further risk for pedestrians and commuters at dangerous intersections along Sheppard Avenue; and

"Whereas demands for underground rapid transit along Sheppard Avenue have been part of public discourse for over 50 years; and

"Whereas the province of Ontario previously approved a plan from the city of Toronto to extend the Sheppard subway line from Downsview to Scarborough Centre; and

"Whereas an extension to the Sheppard subway line will require contributions and co-operation from the city of Toronto, the province of Ontario and the government of Canada;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To support the extension of the Sheppard subway line east to Scarborough Centre; and

"To call upon all levels of government to contribute to multi-year funding for the construction and operation of an extension to the Sheppard subway line."

I fully support it and give the petition to James.

LONG-TERM CARE

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas Ontario has 634 long-term-care facilities providing care for 75,000 residents; and

"Whereas hospitals in Ontario report seeing nursing home patients admitted who are suffering from neglect; and

"Whereas several incidents of neglect prompted the Long-Term Care Task Force on Resident Care and Safety to release an action plan; and

"Whereas caring for the increasing number of patients with cognitive difficulties requires more time for front-line staff to manage patient needs; and

"Whereas staffing levels in Ontario's nursing homes are below the national average (Statistics Canada); and

"Whereas Ontario does not have a minimum staffing ratio;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Liberal government ensures front-line care and staffing levels receive funding precedence over administrative costs."

I agree with this petition. I'll affix my signature and send it to the desk with Bridget.

OFFICE OF THE OMBUDSMAN

Ms. Sarah Campbell: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the province of Ontario is the only province in Canada that does not allow the provincial Ombudsman, who is an officer of the Legislature, to provide trusted, independent investigations of complaints against hospitals, long-term-care homes, school boards, children's aid societies, police, retirement homes and universities; and

"Whereas the people wronged by these institutions are left feeling helpless and most have nowhere else to turn for help to address their issues;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To grant the Ombudsman of Ontario the power to investigate hospitals, long-term-care homes, school boards, children's aid societies, police, retirement homes and universities."

I support this. I will sign it and give it to Aly to deliver to the table.

FAMILY CAREGIVER LEAVE

Ms. Soo Wong: I have a petition to the Ontario Legislative Assembly.

"Whereas the people of Ontario deserve to be able to look after their sick or injured family members without fearing that they will lose their jobs at such a vulnerable time;

"Whereas the people of Ontario deserve to be able to spend time looking for a child that has disappeared, or take time off to grieve the death of a child that was murdered without fearing that they will lose their jobs;

"Whereas the federal government has recently extended similar leaves and economic supports to federal employees;

"Whereas the government of Ontario, and the Premier of Ontario, support Ontario families and wish to foster mental and physical well-being by allowing those closest to sick or injured family members the time to provide support free of work-related concerns;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Legislative Assembly of Ontario pass and enact, during spring of 2013, Bill 21, the Leaves to Help Families Act."

I fully support the petition, and I'll give the petition to Daniel.

HORSE RACING INDUSTRY

Mr. Bill Walker: "Whereas the horse racing industry employs approximately 60,000 people, creates \$1.5

billion in wages and \$2 billion in recurring expenditures annually; and

"Whereas the partnership that was created between government and the horse breeding and racing industry has been a model arrangement and is heralded throughout North America, with 75% of revenues going to the provincial government to fund important programs like health care and education, 5% to the municipalities and only 20% goes back to the horse business; and

"Whereas the horse business is a significant source of revenue for the farming community and rural municipalities;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Ministry of Finance continue the revenue-sharing partnership with the horse racing industry for the benefit of Ontario's agricultural and rural economies."

I support this petition, will sign it and send it with page Katherine.

HOME CARE

M^{me} France Gélinas: I have this petition that comes from all over Ontario, and it reads as follows:

"Whereas many Ontarians need health care services at home and 6,100 people are currently on wait-lists for care;

"Whereas waiting for over 200 days for home care is unacceptable;

"Whereas eliminating the wait-lists won't require any new funding if the government caps hospital CEO salaries, finds administrative efficiencies in the local health integration networks (LHINs) and community care access centres (CCACs), standardizes procurement policies and streamlines administration costs;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That a five-day home care guarantee is established and existing wait-lists eliminated so that Ontarians receive the care they need within a reasonable time frame."

I agree with this petition and will send it with good page James.

LYME DISEASE

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the tick-borne illness known as chronic Lyme disease, which mimics many catastrophic illnesses such as multiple sclerosis, Crohn's, Alzheimer's, arthritic diabetes, depression, chronic fatigue and fibromyalgia, is increasingly endemic in Canada, but scientifically validated diagnostic tests and treatment choices are currently not available in Ontario, forcing patients to seek these in the USA and Europe; and

"Whereas the Canadian Medical Association informed the public, governments and the medical profession in the May 30, 2000, edition of their professional journal that

Lyme disease is endemic throughout Canada, particularly in southern Ontario; and

“Whereas the Ontario public health system and the Ontario health insurance plan currently do not fund those specific tests that accurately serve the process of establishing a clinical diagnosis, but only recognize testing procedures known in the medical literature to provide false negatives at 45% to 95% of the time;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to request the Minister of Health to direct that the Ontario public health system and OHIP include all currently available and scientifically verified tests for acute and chronic Lyme diagnosis, to do everything necessary to create public awareness of Lyme disease in Ontario, and to have internationally developed diagnostic and successful treatment protocols available to patients and physicians.”

This is extremely important, and I agree with it. I'll affix my signature and send it to the desk with Ravicha.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

EMPLOYMENT STANDARDS AMENDMENT ACT (LEAVES TO HELP FAMILIES), 2013 LOI DE 2013 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LES NORMES D'EMPLOI (CONGÉS POUR AIDER LES FAMILLES)

Resuming the debate adjourned on June 5, 2013, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 21, An Act to amend the Employment Standards Act, 2000 in respect of family caregiver, critically ill child care and crime-related child death or disappearance leaves of absence / Projet de loi 21, Loi modifiant la Loi de 2000 sur les normes d'emploi en ce qui concerne le congé familial pour les aidants naturels, le congé pour soins à un enfant gravement malade et le congé en cas de décès ou de disparition d'un enfant dans des circonstances criminelles.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further debate?

Mr. John O'Toole: I had the privilege when this House last dealt with this bill—I believe it was in June some time. At that time I had the floor, and now I have about four minutes left. In summary, it's a good place to start after such a long absence. Mr. Naqvi, the Minister of Labour, with all the right intentions, introduced the bill in March.

At this point in time, we understand the empathetic or sympathetic tone of the thing about giving persons a leave under special medical conditions.

I'll read the regulation under the bill itself. Regulation 49.3 says, “An employee is entitled to a leave”—this is important—“without pay to provide care or support” to a family member who has a serious medical condition. It could be a mother, father, an aging parent. It could be a

child. An employee may take up to eight weeks per calendar year, in addition to other entitlements, which could be related to their contractual arrangements with their employer, or under federal law as well.

It's important that we all support that, but really, Madam Speaker, there's no money in it. It isn't going to cost the government one nickel, but it is going to cost the employer, so it's actually downloading costs to small business.

Hon. John Gerretsen: Unpaid.

Mr. John O'Toole: The unpaid portion is—the work still has to be done, Minister. I hope you understand how business works. You've been a civil servant most of your life, so you don't really understand—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): I ask you to withdraw.

1550

Mr. John O'Toole: At a personal level, I certainly withdraw.

My point is this, though: It sounds good, but it really does nothing in terms of helping a family. For instance, if they had a partner die or who was perilously ill, and you're taking time off work from a job and you're not getting paid, now you have two problems: You can't pay your rent, your car payment or your cellphone bill—all these bills, the taxes that this government has laid on us.

If you have a critically ill child under another section, 49.4—an employee with six months of continuous service is entitled to 37 weeks of care for a critically ill child. No one would fault the intent here, but let's put it on the table: There's no money in it.

It's a feel-good thing. I understand that. The entitlement is there. But is there any other way to help employees? That's what I'm saying.

Interjection: They're just going to blame the feds.

Mr. John O'Toole: You're going to blame the federal government, and that argument has been made about it as well.

I think the rules aren't clear enough. This bill has to go to committee, and my impression is—here's the other thing. You get 37 weeks, but you have to take a week at a time. If they have to go for a chemotherapy treatment once a week—

Mr. Todd Smith: You've got to take the whole week off.

Mr. John O'Toole: —you've got to take the whole week off.

There are portions of this that were actually prepared with a nasty tone to them. There's no money, you've got to take the whole week off—if the person is going for dialysis two or three times a week, you've got to take the week off.

Hon. John Gerretsen: Read the bill.

Mr. John O'Toole: You haven't read the bill, obviously. But it's important; the bill is important. I support it in the sensitivity of what it's trying to achieve. It's a discussion, and we're raising critical errors or problems with the drafting of this bill.

I only have a minute left. I want to put this in a personal—we've all had these experiences; whether it's an aging parent, aging in-laws, these are important things: providing bereavement leaves and other kinds of leave, in palliative care especially today. More importantly, this government is not creating any long-term-care beds. In fact, now they're cutting back on physiotherapy. For persons who are home now because of their hip and knee replacement, physiotherapy is virtually cut off.

If you look at the whole list of things that this Kathleen Wynne government is doing, all I see is more taxes and more cuts to services. I see it and I hear it every single day. I can't for a moment understand why the people of Ontario—I'm pleading with you: Watch what's going on. There's nothing here in this bill that's going to help you directly. Your employer now will have an added expense. They may lay you off, in fact, because they're going to have to hire somebody else anyway to do that job.

Interjections.

Mr. John O'Toole: They have their two minutes. They can respond in their two minutes, and I hope they take their time to agree with the changes that are needed to the bill.

There's 11 seconds. I certainly want to take my time to make sure that—we're supportive of the intention, but we're not supportive of a poorly drafted bill that's all showcase stuff. That's all it is.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The member for Bramalea—Gore—Malton.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: We've had the opportunity to debate this bill before, and I think the idea of having a leave provided for individuals who want to take care of their family is something, of course, we support. That makes sense.

But there are other areas that we need to look at. What I've found more and more is that when we look at addressing problems in our province, we can't look at them through a narrow filter. Many of the issues we face are synergistic in the sense that they're combined symptoms of a greater problem. There are multiple factors that work together.

We're looking at the fact that we want to provide support for loved ones who want to care for someone in their family who is either injured or ill. We also have to look at the support networks we put in place for those individuals. If we had a stronger home care system, that would also alleviate some of the pressure on loved ones. For example, if someone is critically ill and has significant mobility issues and needs to have assistance to get around the home, if there was a strong home care system, that could assist the loved one so that it wouldn't be as much of a burden on them to be able to care for their loved one. If we had home care visits in terms of physicians visiting and taking care of patients at their homes, if we had nursing care available in the home—a broader approach to this problem would provide a more wholesome solution.

So instead of looking at it as just providing the employee with an opportunity to be able to take some

time off so they could keep their job and be able to go and take care of a loved one, let's look at it as a broader solution. What can we do to create a society that provides more avenues to provide the support beyond just that leave? If we looked at these other mechanisms like home care, home visits by doctors, nursing care availability in the home, these would provide a more wholesome approach to caring for individuals.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further comments?

Hon. John Gerretsen: I'd like to comment on the member from Durham, whom I've known for a long time. We've both been here since 1995. He's a well-meaning individual, but he shows exactly what's wrong with the PC Party today, exactly what's wrong with it. They think it's a good idea, but, you know, "We'd better stick up for employers only and forget about employees," because that's really what he's saying.

If he had truly read the bill, it clearly states that there's a gap in the current leaves of absence under the Employment Standards Act. It does not provide for long-term unpaid protected leave. That's what this bill is all about. It speaks to the notion that in certain circumstances it's absolutely important for an employee to be with their family, to look after an aging parent, to look after a critically ill child or a missing child or even, heaven forbid, a deceased child. That's what this is all about. He likes to mix it all up with tax increases, with this and with that and the other thing. This is a good bill.

What I would really like to know is this: Is the Tory party of today going to support this bill or not? Where do they really stand? This is all about giving the people who work in this province on a day-to-day basis further protections in case of need. The employers will not have to pay any more money, but it's to protect the job of the employees when they are in very dire circumstances because of a family emergency. So let him speak to that issue alone. Just stick to the issue. Are you in favour of the bill or are you not in favour of the bill, and which way are you going to vote?

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The member for Wellington—Halton Hills.

Mr. Ted Arnott: I very much appreciate the opportunity to intervene briefly and to answer the Attorney General's question. Yes, we are going to be supporting this bill at second reading. If the Attorney General had been here for the rest of the debate and if he had actually listened to the member for Durham, I think he would have understood that we are supportive in principle of family leave for people who have these kinds of situations.

At the same time, I think it's necessary that the bill, of course, will go to a standing committee of the Legislature so that everybody who has an interest in this issue—including small business people; let's say the CFIB and other groups—will have an opportunity to have their say before this bill comes back for third reading. I think that's an important point.

The member for Durham made an outstanding speech—although there was a bit of a break over the

summer. We were waiting with bated breath for the second part of it, but at the same time, he made good points.

I think it's important, also, to point out that those of us who are privileged to sit in the opposition in this House at the present time and who aspire to serve in government in the future have a job to do in the Legislature. We have a job, and that is to thoroughly debate and analyze and scrutinize legislation. It's our job to hold the government to account. I know it frustrates the government members sometimes to hear us giving our speeches in the House, representing our constituents, but I would suggest to them that if they think about it, they will again conclude that that's democracy too and that we have an obligation to represent our constituents in this place. We do that with a great degree of honour and we bring forward our views after due consideration, obviously. We'll continue to do that in this House, but at the same time we are prepared to work with the government on issues and reach across the partisan divide when the public interest gives us that opportunity to do so. That's what I've always done, as the ministers opposite will know.

I think the member for Durham did an outstanding job this afternoon, and I want to thank him very much for his comments.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further comments and questions?

1600

Mr. John Vanthof: Once again, it's an honour to rise in this House after the summer break. I appreciated listening to the last four minutes of the member for Durham's speech, as he was so rudely interrupted as well by the summer break. I enjoyed listening to all the members' comments, and I found each of the members brought comments that actually added to this debate.

My colleague from Bramalea—Gore—Malton made a really good point: that you can't look at each issue in health care—or any part of legislation, but specifically in health care—you can't look at an issue in isolation and say, "This is good" or "This is bad," because you have to look at the issues around it.

This bill picks one issue: long-term leave for a caregiver. But if you look at it in isolation, as the member from Durham pointed out, there are some big issues with this bill because the people who would benefit the most probably can't afford to take the leave off in the first place. So is it actually helping the people it's targeted at, or is it more targeted as a feel-good bill? That's a legitimate question; it really is.

In my 20 minutes, I'm going to talk about what happened to our family and how it would have worked or not worked. Realistically, we're very fortunate that I didn't have to worry about who was going to pay my grocery bill by having to take a couple of days off to help some of my family members. But the people who really have to worry about that—this bill is not going to help them, and that's something we really, really need to discuss.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The member has two minutes to respond.

Mr. John O'Toole: I'd like to thank the NDP member from Bramalea—Gore—Malton. I did think he picked up the real theme I was talking about. There are other ways of providing supports that don't exist today. In fact, they're being removed. When you look at long-term care or you look at people in their strategy for aging at home, you can't get care. That's the problem. The wait-list—or you're limited to about eight to 10 hours per week, if you're lucky. If you're a person who is convalescent or a person who is aging and can't get out of bed, you need to have care for other periods. So there are other solutions here that this brings to bear outside of this.

The Attorney General mentioned the Employment Standards Act. In fact, if you watch what they're going to say, they're going to blame the federal government about the EI, the employment insurance portion. But I'd say that's part of what they always use as a strategy. It's always somebody else. It's Stephen Harper's fault for everything, basically.

The member from Wellington—Halton Hills is going to be speaking, and I appreciate his complimentary remarks, but he made it very clear: We do support the bill. I think I made that clear at the beginning, at the outset of the bill.

I'd say that the member from Timiskaming—Cochrane talked about a very good part of it. It's the feel-good part. But how do people, like in your case when you were farming up in Timiskaming and perhaps someone in your family gets bad—who milks the cows? Do you understand? If you're going to have the cows milked, you have to hire somebody to do it, if you're going to be taking care of the other person.

So it costs somebody something; no question about it. I call it downloading on small employers—a mum and dad who are operating a 7-Eleven store, and their kids are helping as well. If one of the children gets sick or has cancer or some other disease, now one of the parents can't work and maybe the store closes. If the store closes, they lose money. Somehow, someone—so we must consult with small businesses. I'm not talking about corporations. A good employee and a good employer will work together to solve these problems about leave for a loved one.

I think the bill is a feel-good bill. We'll support it, but support it going to committee, and let's see some real action—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Thank you. Further debate?

The member for London—Fanshawe.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: Thank you, Speaker. I wasn't sure who was going to go first, so thank you very much.

I honestly wish I could say wholeheartedly that today I would support this Bill 21, entitled the Employment Standards Amendment Act (Leaves to Help Families). But that being said, Speaker, I do wholeheartedly support the intent with which it's brought forward.

Ontario families are struggling to make ends meet now more than ever. Taking care of a sick family member escalates the financial and emotional pressure on

families, and they are rightfully looking for us to help them in their time of need when they have someone who is ill and they are feeling that financial burden because they can't make ends meet.

That's where this bill perhaps somewhat looks like it's addressing the problem, because of its intent. But on the real face of this bill, it does not address the real needs of families but offers a band-aid solution.

We all know financial pressure on Ontario families continues to escalate. Someone has to pick up the tab for this government's spending spree, and that burden has fallen on Ontario taxpayers. This government has saddled Ontario families with several billion dollars of debt, thanks to their gas plant, eHealth and Ornge fiascos and in return offers Ontarians the ability to take unpaid time off in order to care for an ill family member.

I think we can all agree that no one should be forced to choose between an ill family member in need of care and losing their job in order to provide care for that family member. As it stands, Ontario families are being forced into these untenable situations that risk their financial stability and their family obligations.

While I strongly support the objective of this proposed bill, I am deeply concerned about the lack of reach and overall effectiveness in actually providing the support necessary to Ontario families and employees. Caregiver leave and employment protections are very important aspects of this issue, but they don't provide us with the full picture.

I can promise you this issue runs deeper than this. When we fail to recognize the dire financial position of many Ontario families, we are risking our ability to truly make that change meaningful so that those we claim we're representing can actually use the services that this bill's attempting to provide.

When we fail to recognize the full picture, the full depth and breadth of their plight, what message does that send? The people of this province are looking for a well-thought-out approach that balances all the key issues at play. We must ask ourselves, is this the best we can do for them?

We must acknowledge that Ontario workers struggle between balancing medical needs of their families and the needs of a paycheque. Too many families in this province are a mere paycheque away from losing their homes, and unpaid leave of any kind does little to relieve their concerns. This is why I feel this amendment could do much more to address those needs.

In its current form, this bill provides no employment insurance support. I understand there is discussion between the federal government about this possibility. My concern is that we have already seen the federal government's willingness to slash and burn much-needed employment supports for Canadian families, and I, for one, am not confident in our federal government's willingness to support this initiative.

With no employment insurance support in this bill, I have to ask, exactly how many Ontario families does this government believe they are helping with this bill? We

all need to understand that without real changes to our employment standards, I fear that we are simply paying lip service to a very serious issue. While job security is a very important issue, especially in a riding like mine, London-Fanshawe, where unemployment is still over 8%, it is not the only concern for those who may need to care for an ill family member.

This amendment is a welcome but small step forward, and yet without a real buy-in from the federal government on EI supports, many will be unable to take advantage of this program. This government must deliver a strong message to our federal government that income supports for those taking this leave are a vital component to the success of this effort.

Currently, most employees are unaware and unclear of their rights under ESA. I want assurances from this government that they will ensure Ontario workers know about the leave and that there are no reprisals for employees taking the leave.

Enforcement is another area of concern surrounding this bill. Not all employees are created equal, and ensuring that employees are protected by law requires diligent oversight and enforcement. I hope this government is up to the challenge of that enforcement because Ontario families who do take this leave will be counting on you.

This is the same government that was proposing to cut \$6 million from the employment standards branch enforcement budget. As a result of the Poverty Reduction Strategy, this government promised to invest an additional \$10 million annually to hire new employment standards officers, to improve the ESA compliance and to reduce the number of backlogged complaints from workers.

Not only are they not getting that promised funding, but now this government proposes to slash their budget by \$6 million and continues to introduce new programs. So as I understand it, we are now expecting the ESA enforcement branch to enforce this program while in the background huge portions of their budgets are being hacked.

1610

When we connect the dots between slashed funding and enforcement, it is hard to imagine how this proposed program will live up to the intention and the needs of our workers and families. I and my NDP caucus know that to make this amendment work for Ontario workers, we need to do much better work with the ESA. We need to stop the cuts to the ESA budget and increase the minimum wage, which is the only way many low-paid workers get a pay increase. We also need to start really looking at the time and monetary limits that ESA imposes on our workers who try to make claims on their entitlements. No other province in Canada imposes limits on unpaid wage recovery. These are very real concerns that we need to address if it is our intention to improve the lives of Ontario workers.

Also, I think this bill does not take into account the emotional distress that a sick family member brings. Whether it is a family taking care of an elderly parent or

a young child, the emotional distress of caring for a family member because there is no other option weighs very heavily. Cooking meals and doing laundry don't begin to cover the 24-hour care required in many of these cases. That's why my private member's bill addressed the need for seniors to get home care within a five-day period. If families could better count on our health care system, we wouldn't have to create partial solutions through bills such as this.

While I am prepared to support this bill, I hope that this government takes what I have said under advisement and begins to look more seriously at the whole range of challenges faced by those caring for sick families.

The member from Bramalea—Gore—Malton actually gave me quite a little bit of an intro to what I was going to connect the dots about the fact that this bill does have good intentions, but it does have many holes in it because our health care system isn't meeting the needs of a lot of Ontarians. One of the ones I'd like to highlight is the needs of seniors. Everyone talks about that we're going to have a seniors explosion in the year 2021. So there's going to be a great need for people to have access to health care in general.

We know from studies and we know—probably a lot of people I've talked to personally, when they get in their golden years, they want to remain at home and they want to have some dignity. They've worked all their lives and they've built a nice home for them to stay in, and because they may need some physical help with some challenges that they've come across physically, they don't want to just abandon their home and go into a long-term-care or retirement centre. They still want to live out the best years they can in their private home, their castle if you will.

This is where this government needs to step up the health care system when it comes to home care. We hear from seniors that there isn't enough home care available to them, as the member from Bramalea—Gore—Malton pointed out. We need to ensure that there are doctors' visits. That would be a great initiative to look at as a holistic approach to helping families that need to look after an elderly parent. As I'm kind of highlighting right now, for the purpose of when we talk about health care or family leave, a lot of people are thinking about an elderly parent.

So the NDP has done some real thoughtfulness—thoughtful information about how to address that particular problem in the health care system when people are at home and they need that help. We proposed a wonderful initiative. It's that five-day home care guarantee for people who are at home. That would help the children of those parents have some kind of psychological relief or peace, if you will, knowing that their parents, when they get home from the hospital in five days, are going to have some professional health care provider come to their home, because even though we have the intent to look after our parents, we aren't medical experts.

The member from Timiskaming—Cochrane had mentioned that we're probably going to have a lot of

examples personally, in our own lives, of some of the situations we faced looking after loved ones. My mother passed away last May, but before that, she was home with my father—elderly parents—and they didn't want to leave their home. Neither one of them wanted to be separated, first of all, and they loved their home. Their home was their castle; it was their comfort. That's where they felt relaxed and at peace, so we tried to oblige that. We tried to oblige them.

This was before I became an MPP, so it kind of felt interesting that I would have been in that position, because I worked for someone—a great employer—but there was no benefit to look after an elderly parent. You weren't paid for that leave. So my sister and I were the primary caregivers. We would work all day, and then we would do our shift after we were done work at my mom and dad's. That would make sure that she got her pills, was bathed for the evening and even had a little interaction, because my dad, of course, was there with her all day, and he got tired.

At that time, there wasn't a lot of home care available to them, for whatever reason, but what I experienced was—I wasn't a PSW. I wasn't certified medically, really, to look after my parents or, in this case, my mother. If we had had a five-day home care guarantee, I would have been more at ease, knowing that someone was coming to the house and looking after my mother's medical needs, and I could do the housekeeping needs to make sure things were kept on that part of the equation because of her illness.

I think that the intention of this bill is good, but it's going to have quite a gap, because people are not going to be able to afford that time off from work if they don't have benefits to look after an aging parent or, perhaps, a sick child, and they're going to be left stressed. It's really hard to make that decision: "Do I continue to work? Because I can't afford to not pay my mortgage or buy the groceries and watch my parents, daughter or son in the hospital because I can't be there." That, again, is not a healthy work environment, when you have to go to work and you're stressed out. Your mind isn't really at work; it's at the hospital with your parent or it's at the hospital with your daughter.

Saying that, is this bill really going to be effective for the people that need it? I would say not really. At least it opens up—I'm not going to say the "conversation" word; I'm going to say it opens up talks and discussions about the realities people are facing today in the job force, the realities families are facing with regard to the lack of health care, and maybe some alternative ways of how we can handle this could come about. It could open up discussions, like we talked about: the five-day home care guarantee; or perhaps we need to have a nurse practitioner go in the home or a doctor go visit the home; or health care equipment, perhaps.

I know we had that seniors' home renovations tax credit; again, that is going to help a very narrow "seniors," because you have to spend a lot of money just to get that tax credit back. That's there and that's fine,

but when you have someone who wants to stay at home and they want to make those improvements that the member talked about, we should have that expanded a little bit further, because it's just not going to touch that particular group—someone who can afford those types of aids and devices at home.

I think the NDP members had thrown out an example from Quebec, how there are more initiatives around those devices that seniors need to stay at home. It's not just if you own your home, but maybe, as we talked about, if you're a tenant and you might need those devices. There are other ways that we can certainly make health care better, if people are not feeling well, so that we can alleviate some of the stress and the burden on their family members. Therefore, that could also help the fact that they may not have to take their leave.

1620

That kind of addresses the Conservatives' concern when you have that mom-and-pop shop and they only have two or three employees. When someone leaves, that leaves quite a gap in their business, and that's one of their concerns.

If we have better health care and home care for people who are not feeling well, then that can help the situation with the employer, because the employee will feel at ease. Their mind will be at ease that their parents, their children, are being looked after properly. Then they can take the time that they need after work, or maybe a shorter time. Maybe it doesn't have to be three weeks.

I think there is a better way of dealing with the actual problem that we're talking about. It's not just a narrow tunnel vision about how to solve it and just give someone three weeks off, and then all the problems will be solved in the health care system. It has to be an approach where we're going to look at it in a holistic approach.

I'd be really interested in seeing it go to committee so we can really have a true discussion, but in that committee I'd like to see some of those discussions come to fruition so that we can actually have a better home care system and tie those two things in.

It will be interesting what comes out of that: if it's just going to be employment-based, or if there will be some expansion beyond the thinking of what this bill was intended for.

With that, Speaker, I just would like to wrap up my feedback on this bill. I hope that it does get to committee. It sounds like the Conservative Party opposite here is also going to support it. I'm going to support it, and it sounds like there's a sense that our caucus will support it as well.

When it gets to committee, I think that's when the real work is going to be done, and we need those really tough discussions to be had. But let's get something done. Let's get some results out of it, because it's extremely important—health care. We all feel passionately about it, but we need to take action.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Comments and questions?

Hon. Linda Jeffrey: I just wanted to comment on the lead that the London-Fanshawe member spoke today. I

thought she provided some very thoughtful discussion on this particular Employment Standards Amendment Act, which is a bill about compassion.

I recall speaking about this bill when I was Minister of Labour and speaking about how important it is to families and job security.

It's about creating unpaid job-protected leave for hard-working Ontarians. I think that when this discussion took place previously when the House was sitting, I remember the member from Nickel Belt also offered some very thoughtful suggestions, so I appreciate the constructive dialogue that we're having about this legislation.

I remember also speaking about this legislation before the Human Resources Professionals Association. They did a survey of their members. I can't remember all the numbers, but it was extraordinary how many of their members felt that this particular gap in legislation—how much this step that we were proposing would mean to their membership and to so many employers. I thought that they offered some very constructive advice as well. I think there are a lot of stakeholders out there that want to speak about this particular need.

There isn't anybody in this Legislature who hasn't had a sick child, a sick parent, somebody in their family that needed you to drop everything to help them. We all know that whenever we're at work and somebody in our family is struggling with a health issue or something of a very serious nature, we want to be there. Knowing that your government is there to provide you with that safety net is important.

I'm happy to speak in favour of this legislation and to know that whether it's somebody who's critically ill or somebody who loses a child—we know that there are a number of stakeholders, whether they're the MS Society, the Parkinson Society, the Alzheimer Society, the Canadian Cancer Society, the caregiver coalition—they're all supportive of this legislation.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further comments?

Ms. Laurie Scott: I'm pleased to provide comment on the member from London-Fanshawe, who spoke for 20 minutes on Bill 21, which is the Employment Standards Amendment Act (Leaves to Help Families), 2013.

Certainly, she is quite accurate. I think all of us get stories in our constituencies or just out in our communities about family members that are struggling to balance between work and trying to assist a family member, if it's just an acute illness or sometimes chronic illness, till they're placed properly within the system to be taken care of. We certainly are supportive of the attempts by this government in the legislation to bridge that gap that does exist in our communities, and helping people.

This is the second time, I believe, the bill has been brought forward. There were some changes made to it. I think it's important that we continue to talk about how we can implement this bill. There are certainly some questions on the federal involvement, pay during the time of leave to protect the job. So there's a lot of discussion that needs to occur.

I think the intent, both, if I can say, federally and provincially, is that we recognize the need in our communities as the elderly population, which the member from London—Fanshawe mentioned that we're facing, kind of explodes. We've all seen those demographic charts and know that there are going to have to be changes not only to this act but probably to how health care is delivered generally.

There are some progressive ideas out there that are innovative that we need to apply to our health care system because it's going to help all of us in the end. People are looking, especially family members, to the advice and some regulations from the government that do assist them in looking after their family members.

I'm pleased to rise today and support this bill and would like it to move forward.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The member for Bramalea—Gore—Malton.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: My colleague from London—Fanshawe was quite accurate. I guess I provided a little bit of an introduction and she went into much more depth of the need to provide multiple avenues in addressing this problem instead of looking at it with one isolated viewpoint. Using the word from my colleague from Timiskaming—Cochrane, all too often we look at issues in this province or problems that we have with an isolated lens, and we need to look at it in a broader perspective.

The one area that I want to touch on with my remaining time—a minute and a half—is that while there was a significant gap in the legislation that we needed to provide this protection for folks who were not covered by any legislation if they were seeking a longer-term leave for a loved one who was facing a critical illness—that gap in legislation did exist and it was important to close that gap, and I think that's definitely a positive step.

The other area that comes up again when we talk about not looking at problems in isolation—there is another corollary that we need to look at, that if we have this protection in terms of legislation, the next piece is that we have to make sure that there's some enforcement. If someone does take this leave and make use of this legislation that provides them with this avenue so that they can take that long-term leave from their employment with the hopes of returning to that employment, how can we ensure that the employer will actually follow through with this? The element of enforcement to make sure that this law, if an employee chooses to make use of it and utilize it—where's the guarantee that an employer doesn't just say, "Listen, it's not cost-effective for me to keep someone on or to let them come back. I could hire someone else in the meantime, train them up and move on with a new employee, and it's not advantageous for me to go back to this person" who's maybe taken a year gap or however many months' gap?

That's something we need to look at as well, the enforcement of all the legislation we've put, particularly when it comes to labour laws.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The member for Scarborough Southwest.

Mr. Lorenzo Berardinetti: I appreciate the opportunity to have some time to comment on the well-spoken words from the member for London—Fanshawe. I listened carefully to her speech and I agree with almost everything she said in her speech.

This bill that's in front of us today, Bill 21, is basically an amendment to the Employment Standards Act. I think it allows for a lot of opportunities to protect people who are vulnerable, who have to leave. The act is pretty straightforward. If someone wants to take extra time off, their employer can't fire them if they need to take care of various people: for a critically ill child, for a missing child, for a deceased child, and also time to take care of a family member who may be sick. That's the bulk of what I see in this bill.

The world has changed a lot in the past couple of decades, especially with the fact that people are living longer and also the fact that employers in general sometimes try to find excuses to fire someone. We're doing something to protect that, and if someone takes a long leave of absence, they don't have to worry about losing their jobs. That's what I think is the most important part about this bill.

1630

I think it goes to committee, which I'm looking forward to. Amendments can be made; they usually are. In the committees that I've sat on, the opposition has brought forward amendments, and sometimes they're very good amendments, and they work to amend the bill. So that's why I think—I'm looking forward to this going to committee and to having that discussion there. Then it comes back here and we debate it again one more time during third reading. So I think there's an opportunity to thoroughly go through this bill, especially at committee, where a lot of the work is done, and I'm sure there will be suggested amendments, and hopefully we'll come back with a good, strong bill that we can talk about and vote on. So I look forward to that.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The member for London—Fanshawe has two minutes to respond.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: I'd like to thank the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, the member from Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock, the member from Bramalea—Gore—Malton and the member from Scarborough Southwest. Thank you very much for your comments on my remarks with regard to this bill.

From what I hear, it sounds like we're all in agreement that this bill has some good intentions, that it has some good ideas behind the bill, and that we're all looking forward that if we are going to pass it to committee, then that's where the real work can be done. I always enjoy sitting on the committees because I like to hear the deputations of interested parties and who they feel it's going to affect the most.

Sometimes in that committee, there are other ideas or legislation that we can take out of those deputations. I know particularly if it's going to—the deputations will be strictly on this bill, but I'm hoping there will be some

good feedback on that, that we can actually look at a holistic approach, maybe in other areas later, because as I mentioned, if we did have a strong five-day-home-care-guarantee bill passed in this House, that could certainly alleviate some of the issues that people may feel from the stress, even just if they had this leave, of looking after a loved one.

I look forward to it passing and that when it does get into committee, we all do the hard work that it takes in order to make sure that when it comes back for third reading, we have a really strong bill with some teeth that can actually help people in their time of need when they do need to take some time off to look after a loved one.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further debate?

Hon. Jeff Leal: It's a pleasure to rise on second reading of the Employment Standards Amendment Act (Leaves to Help Families), 2013, and it's a pleasure to speak to this proposed legislation because this bill goes to the heart of what government should do. Our legislation would help the working people of our province to be with their loved ones when they are needed most, at times of major health issues and tragic situations involving children.

The Leaves to Help Families act, if passed, would provide up to eight weeks of unpaid job-protected leave so that employees could care for loved ones who have a serious medical condition. An employee could take up to eight weeks per year per family member. A family member for whom an employee could request unpaid time off to care for would include the employee's spouse; a parent, step-parent or foster parent of the employee or the employee's spouse; a child, step-child or foster child of the employee or the employee's spouse; a grandparent, step-grandparent, grandchild or step-grandchild of the employee or the employee's spouse; the spouse of a child of the employee; the employee's brother or sister; or a relative of the employee who is dependent on the employee for care or assistance.

Importantly for many in our province, it could be taken to care for family members who live in other countries. We know that many Ontarians are born outside of Canada, and in the greater Toronto area that percentage is about half. The importance of having job-protected time to take care of family members who have a serious medical condition is all the more important when distance separates us from those we care about and we must travel to be with them.

Our proposed legislation would also entitle parents to up to 37 weeks of unpaid job-protected leave to provide care for a critically ill child.

In addition, this bill would show compassion by providing up to 52 weeks of unpaid job-protected leave for parents of a missing child. As a parent myself, this would be a nightmare for us, unlimited stress to a family.

It would also provide up to 104 weeks of unpaid job-protected leave for parents of a child who has died where the disappearance or death is probably the result of a heinous crime.

The hard-working people of our province and those who depend on them deserve nothing less than this. Every member of this House and those who are listening to the proceedings today share a common experience. We are either sons or daughters, we have parents and grandparents, and we have spouses and children. In short, we are all part of a family, and when those family members have major health problems, we want to be there because we care.

There are many things that members of this House may debate and have various opinions on. However, the need for compassion for our loved ones when they face a medical crisis is not one of them, and that's because everyone in this chamber and those who may be watching these proceedings on television this afternoon know that when loved ones face a major health problem, we need to be at their side at all times. We need to care for, to reassure those who are closest to our family. It is when we face a major medical problem that we realize just how dependent we are on those who care for us, and it's when our family members have major health issues that we realize how dependent they are on us.

I know a colleague of my wife's at a school in Peterborough. Her sister lived in Grafton, Ontario, and has one of the most difficult forms of cancer, that being bone cancer, and recently moved to Peterborough to be with her sister, for her sister to provide that care. Because we are very fortunate in our community of Peterborough now to have a radiation bunker, and when you have this severe form of bone cancer, a radiation bunker and treatment can provide much-needed relief.

At these times, our concentration and concerns are not on our day-to-day work, but on working to help those loved ones to get better. We all know that time stands still when our loved ones face such a crisis, and nothing else in this world matters.

Speaker, this legislation, if passed, would give the province's working people time—time to care for their elderly parents, time to be with a hospitalized child, time to be with their spouse who has had a stroke or a heart attack. There is an obvious need for this legislation that is all too familiar to anyone who has faced the challenge of balancing work with family members who are struggling with major health problems.

We all know we have a growing aging population. We are going to have 43% more seniors a decade from now and twice as many seniors 20 years from now. We know that our seniors make enormous contributions to our society, but of course we also know that as people age, they need more care, and there are times involving serious medical conditions, like a broken hip or a stroke, when human need is absolutely critical. Our seniors naturally want to be at home as long as they can be, and it is the care by family members that helps ensure the ability to remain where they want to be: at home, where they are most comfortable and feel most secure; at home, where there's less expense for our health care system and less pressure on needed health services.

Our government—your government—through my colleague Minister Deb Matthews has launched a care

strategy to help seniors remain healthy and provide better care at home, where they desire to be at all times.

Our proposed family care leave recognizes the vital role family members play in our health care, but to provide that care and fulfill that role, working Ontarians need to know that their jobs are protected and will be there while they look after their loved ones. We also know that taking care of a loved one who is ill does not solely consist of accompanying them to MRIs or chemotherapy, but involves staying with them afterwards and helping them every step of the way. It is a job, my friends, that has no breaks.

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Here is what the Canadian Cancer Society vice-president, Rowena Pinto, had to say about this legislation in a March 6, 2013, news release: "Bill 21 is welcome news for those who need to take leave from work to care for a loved one with cancer. This legislation will allow families to concentrate on supporting their loved ones instead of worrying about losing their jobs." Ms. Pinto explained, "Cancer is more than a health issue. It is also a complex social issue. With approximately 22% of Canadians grappling with caregiving responsibilities for seriously ill family members, the physical, emotional, and financial burden on caregivers is a veritable strain on many families." This is why we introduced this important proposed piece of legislation.

We've received other supportive words of encouragement regarding this proposed legislation. Sue Vander-Bent, the executive director of the Ontario Home Care Association, has said, "Home care systems are dependent on the support of families and loved ones. For many, the caregiving responsibilities are intense, emotional and lengthy in duration and the demands can result in absence from work. The Leaves to Help Families will provide family caregivers with peace of mind related to their employment. The members of the Ontario Home Care Association are hopeful that all parties will move quickly to pass this legislation."

The executive vice-president of health care for the Service Employees International Union has said, "This legislation will provide urgently needed relief to overstretched families who are caring for a loved one while juggling responsibilities like work and raising children."

Mary Lewis, the executive director, mission, the Heart and Stroke Foundation of Ontario, has said, "We are very pleased to support the Ontario government's proposed legislation, the Employment Standards Amendment Act (Leaves to Help Families), 2013, and congratulate the government on taking this important step to protect the job security of Ontarians caring for loved ones. The Heart and Stroke Foundation recognizes that the health and support of caregivers is a vital aspect in a person's recovery from heart disease and stroke. We look forward to working together to further support caregivers through our health and information programs, like Living with Heart Disease and Living with Stroke, in order to give Ontarians much-needed support when filling this role after a tragic event."

David Harvey, the chief public policy and program initiatives officer of the Alzheimer Society of Ontario, commented, "The Alzheimer Society of Ontario recognizes the commitment of the new government to improve the supports available to family caregivers. Families value being able to support their family members to live in the community. Families indeed are the front line of community care and it only makes sense for new 'enablers' so that people can integrate family and employment responsibilities."

Lisa Levin, chair of the Ontario Caregiver Coalition, said in supporting this bill, "The Ontario Caregiver Coalition, a collaborative that works to advance the interests of caregivers, is pleased that our decision-makers are recognizing the important contributions made by caregivers. Based on national data, it is estimated that caregiving contributes between \$24 billion and \$31 billion annually to maintain the health of Canadians. Caregivers need our support to continue their critical role. This is the beginning of a broader dialogue on economic and social supports to help those who take care of their loved ones."

We've introduced this bill so that people can take care of loved ones without fear of losing their employment. Our proposed legislation would provide reasonable protection for both employers and employees alike. If passed, and I'm confident it will be, this proposed legislation would be enforced by Ministry of Labour employment standards officers who could step in if employees' rights are denied. It is our way of saying to the people of this great province that we will help protect you as you protect your loved ones.

The same spirit of compassion that inspired this bill also led our government to introduce the family medical leave back in 2004. The current family medical leave legislation provides unpaid job-protected leave for employees when a family member is facing a terminal condition. Our proposed family caregiver leave would apply in cases of a serious medical condition, even where there is no significant risk of imminent death. Our proposed family caregiver leave would be in addition to the family medical leave. This means that if you are caring for a loved one under the proposed family caregiver leave and their condition becomes terminal, you would also be entitled to the family medical leave.

Our province also provides personal emergency leave. This leave may be taken for a personal illness, injury or medical emergency of an employee, or the death, illness, injury or medical emergency of, or matter concerning certain family members and relatives that are dependent on you for care and assistance.

Again, our bill, if passed, would help the most vulnerable among us to protect those they love who are struggling with major health issues. A working mom should not have to hesitate to take time away from a critically ill or injured child or her husband with a serious medical condition because she fears losing her income. A single parent, Madam Speaker, should not have to choose between their employment or being there with an elderly

father or mother who has just suffered a stroke or a broken hip.

There's another group, of course, to whom an unequal share of responsibility for caregiving has fallen, and that is the poor and the marginalized. No one would want a mother to worry about providing for her child who is critically ill or injured because she fears she would lose all or a significant part of that family's livelihood. An employee who is working part-time or on a temporary contract can also be among those who are among the most vulnerable and who may have the greatest fear of losing their job when they need to take time off when a family crisis occurs.

So our bill would make all employees who are covered by the Ontario Employment Standards Act eligible for this proposed job-protected family caregiver leave. Whether they are full-time, part-time or on a temporary contract, Ontario employees will be covered by the Employment Standards Act and would be eligible for these leaves. This is fair and just for all, for we know that one thing working Ontarians need most when it comes to caring for family members with major health issues is the time to be with a loved one.

This proposed legislation is part of our government's commitment to ensure that families across this great province have the support they need when they need it most. Madam Speaker, our proposed Leaves to Help Families act is a matter of compassion, and caring for those who provide care to their loved ones. It's just simply the right thing to do for all Ontario families. With our proposed legislation, we would be able to tell working Ontarians to take care of their loved ones and make it their top priority. This bill is the right thing to do for working people of this great province and for those that we all love.

Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Comments and questions?

Ms. Laurie Scott: I'm pleased to rise again today to comment on the Minister of Rural Affairs' remarks on the caregiver act that we are discussing this afternoon. I think we have all shared many stories from our areas of the hardships families do incur when they are caring for a loved one, as I said, whether with an acute or a chronic problem, until there is better care available.

We have all agreed, I think—all the speakers that have been up here have agreed—that there has to be attention paid to this. So we look forward to it going to the committee because, as I have said before, we just have to work out a few things: the federal government's participation in this, as well as the provincial regulations. And stakeholder consultation, I have noticed, is not that consistent on some things. I think more of that needs to be done. As I said before, it was brought in once. It was changed a bit to make it better when it was brought in the second time, and I think we can always improve on that.

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I know that certainly a relative of mine—at that point she was working in one of the financial institutions in the

riding and had to take a leave of absence. When your parents die, you have to be there. It's not something we can all plan out, and sometimes it's a slower process than the sudden death of an individual, and family members have to be there. We all, of course, tried to support as much as possible to give her a break, but she literally, for her own mental and physical state, had to take a leave of absence from work. You just cannot do both.

I think there's recognition from all parties that that's a situation that's occurring out there, the demographic of an aging population that we have. I'm pleased that we're at least addressing the issue in these steps.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further comments?

Mr. John Vanthof: Once again it's an honour to be able to stand in this House and comment on the review of this bill given by the Minister of Rural Affairs and the comments from the member from Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes.

We're almost at the point where we want to move on. The Minister of Rural Affairs did a good job of explaining the need and explaining the reasoning that his government gave. On this side, we're trying to bring out the things that we think could be improved. He gave the example of a working mom and a sick child: She didn't have to worry about losing her income. Well, she does. She doesn't have to worry about losing her job, but she is going to lose her income. That's because the people who are most at risk, the people who have fairly high incomes and fairly secure jobs—most of them can work this out by themselves with their employer. The people who could benefit from this bill are the people who have—some employers aren't so great out there. Those are the people who are going to need this bill, and those are the people who can't afford the eight weeks. The minister made mention of family medical leave, but it's not the same because under family medical leave you get money under EI, and that's a whole different ball of wax because then you're not losing your income. I think we have to work really hard to try and make this bill coordinate with the feds, and maybe with provincial money, so that the people who are most at risk can actually benefit from this bill.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further comments?

Mr. Vic Dhillon: First, I just want to give a brief overview of what this bill provides. It's a bill that provides job protection for families who have to care for a loved one, and it provides eight weeks of unpaid leave with job protection. Also, if someone has to look after a critically ill child: For that, this bill would provide 37 weeks of unpaid job-protected leave from their employer. Also, in the case of a missing child, where there is a probability of the fact that crime is involved: In that situation, the employer would have to give 52 weeks of job-protected leave. The other thing that we've added since this bill was introduced was for a deceased child with the probability that the child is deceased due to crime; for that, the employee would be entitled to up to 104 weeks of job-protected leave.

This past summer, this issue hit close to home for me when my daughter became ill. I was fortunate enough that I was at an event with the member from Mississauga—Streetsville and a couple of other municipal colleagues that I was able to ask to leave and was granted sort of permission to go look after my daughter. It was only then when I realized how fortunate I am that I was able to reshuffle and reschedule my events to go and look after my daughter.

It is with bringing legislation such as this that we can help other Ontarians who may be going through that very critical stage in their life. So I'm hopeful that we will be able to go to committee and go forward with this bill.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further comments.

Mr. Todd Smith: It's a pleasure to get up and join the debate. I will have an opportunity to speak for about 20 minutes on this bill in just a few moments, but I'll just provide some comments on the comments by the Minister of Rural Affairs, who did a very good job, I must say, explaining why this type of legislation is necessary. Compassion was there in his voice—we heard that—and compassion is at the root of this bill from the government. But wouldn't it be great if this government were able to actually provide something—as the member from Timiskaming—Cochrane pointed out—to these people who are in need?

There are many who can afford to have a caregiver come to their home and look after their loved ones, but there are many who cannot, and they are going to lose their income; it's a simple fact. Wouldn't it be great if we were in a province that actually had its act together financially and was able to actually supply some support to these people so that they could stay in their jobs and create some wealth and income of their own? But we don't live in that province. This province is broke, and we're running deficits around \$10 billion, or even higher, every year, because this government can't get its act together.

If they really wanted to be a compassionate government, they would look at the bills that are going to get our economy going again. We in the PC caucus have put forward all kinds of ideas on how this government can actually kick-start the economy in Ontario. If we get growth going in the province of Ontario, then we can afford to look after these people and we can be a compassionate province. These guys are waiting for the feds to do it. They haven't taken the bull by the horns and done it on their own. I'm going to talk about this a little bit later on, but I do appreciate the comments from the Minister of Rural Affairs.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The minister has two minutes to respond.

Hon. Jeff Leal: I want to thank my colleagues across the aisle, the members from Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock and Timiskaming—Cochrane; Brampton West, particularly, sharing the personal details about his daughter who became ill; and, of course, my good friend, and formerly a wonderful radio announcer, from Prince Edward—Hastings—their thoughtful comments today.

I was a little remiss when I started my remarks today. I should have congratulated all of the new members who arrived in this House just recently: the members from Etobicoke—Lakeshore, Windsor—Tecumseh, London West, Ottawa South and Scarborough—Guildwood. I want to personally welcome them here. We know that they will all be making contributions to this House, in their own very unique ways, over the next months and, of course, years to come as this government moves forward.

Frankly, on Bill 21, I'm hearing a consensus on all sides. I was speaking at an event this past week or so in Peterborough, and I said, "You know, when it comes to minority government, we're all the government, on all sides, in a minority government situation." I think this is a good example of all of us being a part of the government here today, with Bill 21.

I listened intently to the fine remarks from the official opposition and, indeed, the third party; there is common ground here. We need to get Bill 21 to committee in a quick fashion, after we've had the appropriate amount of debate and scrutiny on Bill 21—an opportunity to hear from the good folks across the province of Ontario. They will inevitably come forward and make presentations which will lead to suggested amendments to improve and strengthen this bill. But this is an important bill. Ontarians want this bill, and together we can move this bill forward.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further debate.

Mr. Todd Smith: Like my good friend and colleague from Peterborough, the Minister of Rural Affairs, I would like to congratulate the new members of the Legislature as well. I haven't had the opportunity to do that. Of course, I have with Mr. Holyday from Etobicoke—Lakeshore—but also the members from Windsor—Tecumseh and Scarborough—Guildwood and Ottawa South: Welcome to the Legislature. We all are very fortunate and I think humbled and honoured to be members of this Legislature and have the ability to stand here in this House on a daily basis, now that we're back at it in the dog days of summer, to debate bills like Bill 21 and the various bills that we have encountered in the first few days of the Legislature resuming after the summer break.

1700

Let me say that really not much has changed since we left in June. We have the same slate of bills before us as we had when we left, and there's nothing here that's actually going to turn the province around. Sure, there are some compassionate bills before us that might actually improve the lives of some members of Ontario, but what we really need is something that's going to change the direction of the province and turn it around, as I was alluding to earlier, so that we can actually provide the social programs that we have come to expect here in Ontario. Those social programs are in a lot of trouble, and we have experienced it over the summer. We have seen the cuts to physiotherapy that were announced to our seniors and then pulled back on because they were

losing that public relations war. These are the kinds of things that we've been seeing over the last 10 years under the Liberal government. We can't afford to provide the programs that people expect here in Ontario because the Liberal government can't get their finances in order. They can't get their act together, and they're not proposing any new bills that are going to do that, to get us back on the right track financially. As I say, we have put forward all kinds of ideas for this government, starting with that public sector wage freeze that we've been talking about since the day I arrived here in November 2011. We haven't seen the government act on that.

We need to take a pause, and we need to slow down our spending. We've said many, many times that this government doesn't have a revenue problem; they have a spending problem. We're bringing in more revenue and more taxes than we ever have here in Ontario—

Interjection.

Mr. Todd Smith: And the Attorney General knows that, because it's right there in black and white. If you look at the budget, we're raking in tax dollars like we've never seen before and revenue that we've never seen before, but we have a structural spending problem, and that's putting these types of social programs that we would love to provide to our residents in Ontario in jeopardy.

Now, let me get to the bill. Bill 21 is the Employment Standards Amendment Act, which is the leaves to help families, and I understand that the aim of this bill is a good one. Right? We do want to provide some opportunity for family members who have an ill or deceased child or family member the ability to stay at home and provide the care that they need—great intention, Madam Speaker, and we do support this bill.

As many of my colleagues have said before me here this afternoon, for the year now that we've been debating a bill to this end, this bill actually is an improvement on the version that this government brought forward in the last session. It's an improvement that wouldn't have been possible, though, without some of the comments that came from both the official opposition and members of the third party, the NDP, as well. The member from Timiskaming—Cochrane has already spoken this afternoon and talked about some of the ways that this bill should be improved, and the member from Bramalea—Gore—Malton has done the same. There are all kinds of reasons and good ideas that are coming from the opposition, and that's why we debate these bills in the Legislature. We were kind of lectured yesterday, as a matter of fact, on the fact that we were debating bills, but that's our job. That's what we do here in the Legislature, and that's how we make positive changes to the legislation going forward. Sure, we want to get it to committee and we can make some changes there, but we all spend time listening to our constituents in our ridings.

I can tell you that over the summer, in Prince Edward—Hastings, at my Belleville constituency office on Millennium Parkway, where I have the greatest constituency staff in Ontario, we heard from all kinds of people, and

not just seniors. We heard from family members who are dealing with cancer. Cancer strikes at such a young age now. We have children who are dealing with cancer, and I know the Minister of Rural Affairs, when he was speaking, talked about the endorsement that the government has received on Bill 21 from the Canadian Cancer Society, and I understand why they would, because it makes a lot of sense. We have so many people in our province, in our country and in the world in general who are dealing with cancer that there need to be supports in place, and this is one. However, a lot of the burden is being placed on the federal government to provide the services. There's nothing really here that the Ontario government is providing, except ensuring that those who want to take this caregiver leave will have their job after they do so.

But there are so many stories, and we've all heard them in our ridings. I've got a lovely young lady from Tweed who has contacted my office and my MP's office. Her name is Kristy Thrasher-Emigh. Her story has been well publicized over the summer months in the Quinte region. She took time off. She was pregnant and had a baby. Shortly after returning to work she was diagnosed with breast cancer, and she can't get any kind of support right now because she took her EI. And because she didn't work long enough after coming back from her maternity leave, she can't acquire any kind of support. Honestly, if this province had its act together, then this province would be able to do something for her. Honestly, I feel for her, and I hope that our federal counterparts really do come to the aid of this young lady, because it doesn't seem right that someone has paid into the EI system for 17 years, I believe it is, has had a job throughout that entire time—and then when they actually need to get the benefits, they can't access the benefits and the supports that are in place, for what I believe is this kind of a situation for Ms. Thrasher-Emigh up in Tweed in my riding.

But there are so many stories, and I know we all get them. Family members are taking time off, and as has been alluded to many times here today, those family members who are taking time off aren't getting any support. They're able to take the time off and look after their family member, which is fantastic, but they're not getting any financial support.

What we've seen over the summer, as well, is just the erosion of the health services that we have experienced and that we have come to expect. I think another one that's occurred—I talked about the physio and the cutbacks in physio, but we've also seen the diabetic strips. What we have seen is a government that doesn't have its act together is now nickel-and-diming to try and stay afloat and to try and do the best they can to provide some kind of service. What they're doing is, they're not paying for these diabetic strips. I get dozens and dozens of calls from residents in my riding who are on fixed incomes. Many of them are seniors or they're on some kind of social support program, and they are not going to have these diabetic strips, which they need. It's going to

end up costing them \$1,000 this year that they don't have because the government doesn't have its act together.

Just a few weeks ago, the CCAC in my area—and I feel for the CCAC and some of these organizations that are trying to provide service because they're getting word from the local health integration network, "Look, you guys have to do something to balance your budgets and keep your finances in order here." Meanwhile, the province can't do it, but they're being forced to. The CCAC had put out a notice to my office that they were going to actually be reducing services to seniors in my area who didn't require daily services. Now, they didn't do that. The CCAC didn't do that. They sent a memo just last week saying that they've decided maybe that's not the best course of action to try and balance their budget, but that's what they were faced with.

The whole notion that this government is going to be able to provide home care in the community is just a pipe dream right now. Our CCACs are not prepared to do it. The LHINs are not prepared for this. I'm not exactly sure what the local health integration networks have been doing for the last seven years, but I can tell you that in my riding, in Prince Edward county—and the Minister of Rural Affairs put the stat on the table. There's going to be a 43% increase in seniors in Ontario in 10 years—a 43% increase. Somebody has to provide care to these seniors who are going to need it.

1710

The government says they're going to provide the care in the home. In my riding, in Prince Edward county, we're seeing services being removed from Prince Edward County Memorial Hospital. That's a hospital that was built by the people of Picton, the people of Prince Edward county. Quinte Health Care is removing services continuously from that hospital. The Prince Edward County Memorial Hospital Foundation is worried that before long there's not going to be a hospital in their community. They've had no reassurances from the LHIN on what kind of services are going to remain at Prince Edward County Memorial Hospital, but were led to believe by this government, "Don't worry about it. The services are going to be there so that people in Prince Edward county can get the care in their home."

The CCAC isn't equipped to do that. The LHINs have had seven years to prepare for this and they haven't laid out any kind of vision as to what health care is going to look like in Prince Edward county in the next year, let alone the next 10 years. So the LHINs have been a failure—there's no question about it—and they are the ones that are doling out the money to organizations like the CCAC and telling them that they have to come back with a balanced budget and provide the services to those who need them. But as we say, there's no way that with a 43% increase in seniors a decade from now—when they can't even provide the services to those in the community now and we're going to have this kind of an explosion in our senior population, some changes are going to have to be made.

Long-term-care beds: It was mentioned earlier in the debate that we haven't seen long-term-care beds built in

the province in quite some time. There is a huge backlog in Hastings county, in my community, to get into a long-term-care facility. I was at a beautiful community carnival just last week up at Moira Place, which is an absolutely beautiful long-term-care facility in Tweed. They had the community carnival there, and it was a great family atmosphere; a lot of people and children were there visiting with the residents of that home. The staff were playing games and there was a pie contest and it was just a great event. But we need more Moira Places. We need more long-term-care facilities. People can't get into an LTC bed because the government hasn't made any investments in those areas. It's great if we can provide the service in our homes, but that's not happening in our communities today.

So back to the legislation for a moment. As I mentioned earlier, it's an improvement on the similar legislation that was introduced in the last session in that it eliminates some inconsistencies between the Canada Labour Code and the Ontario Employment Standards Act.

Family medical leave is already available to Ontarians for up to 26 weeks. In order to qualify for it, though, a health practitioner has to sign a certificate stating that the individual needing care is at significant risk of death within 26 weeks.

The bill also creates critically ill child care leave of 37 weeks in Ontario, and this leave will largely be paid for by the federal government, which created benefits for critically ill child care leave in June 2013.

It also creates crime-related child death or disappearance leave of up to 104 weeks in Ontario. In January, the federal government began to issue benefits for this kind of leave that would last for 37 weeks. In addition, the bill creates a leave of 52 weeks if it's suspected but not confirmed that the child's death or disappearance is caused by crime.

By closing the inconsistencies between what leaves are covered by federal benefits and what leaves are available in Ontario, the government has drafted a piece of legislation that's more than just an errant piece of paper, unlike its counterpart from the previous session that we were debating back in the spring and over the winter months of last year.

I covered many stories as the news director at Quinte Broadcasting back in the Quinte region, crime-related deaths and the disappearances of children, and they are heartbreaking for a community and devastating for a family. So it's only fair that the government bring forward this kind of legislation that will at least allow family members to take time off and make sure that their jobs are there for them if this type of tragic and heinous situation should arrive and affect their lives. I can tell you, having met with many families and covered the stories, similar occurrences like this, that this is a compassionate bill in that way, in that it provides that kind of service to a family so that they can at least be at home with their family members and grieve in some cases and provide care in others. So we are going to support this bill going forward.

As I mentioned, some of the issues that we had discussed previously have been altered in this latest Bill 21, the employment standards amendment, but there are still some improvements that could be made. My colleague from Durham actually outlined one of the issues with this bill earlier, and as the small business critic for the official opposition, I can tell you that there is an impact on small businesses with the way that this bill stands right now. We do need to consult with the Canadian Federation of Independent Business and we do need to consult with stakeholders who would be adversely affected by it, and hear from them and get their input on how we can make improvements to this bill, so that it doesn't end up costing small businesses in the long run.

I can tell you that when I speak to small businesses now, they're hanging on by a thread, many of them. Sure, there are some successful businesses in Ontario, obviously, but many small businesses are hanging on by a thread, and the reason that they're hanging on by a thread is that they've been hit with incredibly high electricity bills. The electricity bills just continue to rise, and we know, because the Minister of Finance has told us himself, that those increases are going to continue because of the Green Energy Act and the global adjustment. It's going to become even tougher for our small business people, so there are some concerns when it comes to rising energy costs for our small businesses.

There are concerns, of course, to a certain point, about this type of legislation as well when you're talking about a small, family-run business, but there are so many things that need to be addressed in Ontario right now that aren't being addressed by the current government. Our party continues to bring forward private members' bills that are going to turn the province around financially, so that we can ensure that we have these types of public programs—social nets and social programs—that we can depend on, while we're getting all of these feel-good bills from the current government.

There's nothing wrong with this bill. There are a few things that need to be fixed up, but providing an opportunity for families to care for their loved ones when they're ill makes sense. We want to do that, but there are other bills we're talking about as well—the Ontario wireless bill that we were debating earlier today, Bill 60; sure, we can look at that, but is it a priority right now for Ontarians? I think not, and I can tell you, having spread out across the province over the summer months—from Sudbury in the north down into the Hamilton area, and also in Scarborough for much of the summer, and up in Ottawa—I talked to a lot of people and a lot of businesspeople as well. Did this issue ever come up when I was talking to them? No, it didn't. Did the cellphone bill come up? No. It's not a priority for the people of Ontario right now. Did the Local Food Act come up? Maybe when I was talking to some farmers, it came up, but in general? No, and when I was going door to door, it didn't come up.

What people are talking about right now is the affordability—or the lack of affordability—of the cost of

living in this province right now, and the fact that the government is doing nothing to try and keep those increases in the cost of living in check. The biggest one is the electricity bills, and we're doing absolutely nothing on the government side of the House to address those situations. Our party has brought forward many bills—probably about five of them since I've been here—to address the rising cost of electricity, which seems to be the biggest issue on the minds of people across Ontario right now; whether they're business owners or homeowners, they simply can't afford to live in their homes, let alone take time off of their job to look after a loved one.

These are the kinds of things that I believe we should be looking at, and these are the things that should be priorities: making sure that we get our economy started again, because if we don't get our economy going and increase growth from 1.5% or wherever it's at right now, we're not going to be able to provide any kind of health care program, let alone being able to provide home care services and these types of social programs that we've come to expect here in Ontario.

With 20 seconds or so left, I look forward to hearing from my colleagues here in the Legislature more about Bill 21, the Employment Standards Amendment Act (Leaves to Help Families), but we will be, of course, supporting this bill, and we look forward to making some amendments to it when it actually does get to committee.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

1720

Ms. Sarah Campbell: I am pleased to rise today and comment on some of the remarks that were made by the member from Prince Edward—Hastings. I appreciate the breadth of subject matter that he has provided us with today—some of them about the bill; some of them about other things.

I guess one of the things I wanted to talk about before I get to the bill is, if you listen to the Progressive Conservatives these days—the latest iteration of the Progressive Conservatives—they sound like they are really caring about the downtrodden Ontarians across this province, but if we remember, it was that government that downloaded a number of services, and this is really what is plaguing a lot of people, especially in my area. In my area of the province, people are struggling with out-of-control property taxes, and that's because of all the services that were downloaded onto the municipality, like roads, bridges, infrastructure, all that kind of stuff, as well as the local district services boards, whether it's Ontario Works—the whole nine. So those are the big issues, and I'm encouraging people who are at home and who are watching this just to keep that in mind when they're listening to some of the comments that are made.

Getting back to this bill, regardless of the deficiencies that are in the bill, I just wanted to say that I think that it's important—and I don't know if enough of us have been saying that so far—to protect workers who, for whatever reason, may find themselves in a very tight

bind because they might have a loved one or somebody who is close to them who is very ill, and they may need to take some time off work. That said, though, I do have some questions about how it is going to be implemented. What's the definition of "serious"? How is this going to be policed? Who is going to police this? Do we have the resources in the province of Ontario to actually make sure that the good intentions of this bill are actually implemented?

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further comments?

Mr. Vic Dhillon: I'm very happy to speak again on this bill. The member from Prince Edward–Hastings seems to think that this bill would have negative consequences on business. I happen to disagree with him, because having an employee at a workplace who's stressed out about a family member or a loved one who is sick at home will only diminish the loyalty and the productivity in that business. As an employer, as an MPP—all of us employ people in our offices—I always try to keep an open dialogue with my staff about their personal lives, and if they need to have time off because of a personal situation, I encourage them that, "I want you guys to be happy," especially in our constituency offices, where things are often fast-paced and can be quite stressful.

As a matter of fact, in relation to the business aspect, the HRPA did a survey of its members, and 96% of their members supported this bill and thought this was the right direction to go. In terms of other jurisdictions, Manitoba has done this. Yukon, Saskatchewan, and Newfoundland and Labrador are on their way to making protected job leave a law in their provinces. As well, we've received endorsements from the MS Society, the Parkinson Society, the Alzheimer Society, the Canadian Cancer Society and the caregiver coalition.

Simply, this bill is about compassion. It's the right thing to do, and we want to ensure that working Ontarians have peace of mind.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further comments?

Mr. Monte McNaughton: I'm pleased to rise to add some comments to this bill as well. I support what my friend from Prince Edward–Hastings has said. Bill 21, I guess, is the reworking of Bill 30. As I'm sure everyone who's aware knows, this was introduced, I believe, back in December 2011, when then-Premier McGuinty was the Premier, Dwight Duncan was the finance minister—

Interjection.

Mr. Monte McNaughton: —and yes, my colleague from Huron–Bruce recalls this bill being introduced before the House was prorogued. We all remember that.

But I remember this bill because it was one of the first bills that we debated after the election—I think somewhere thereabouts in that time frame. I enjoyed the opportunity to speak to Bill 30 at that point and outlined a number of concerns that our caucus had with this legislation, including the fact that the bill was tabled without any proper consultation. There was no consulta-

tion with stakeholders or with the small business community in particular.

As the member from Prince Edward–Hastings pointed out correctly, the fact is that we have major challenges in the province of Ontario now. This bill, which we are supporting, is important to many people, but there are major challenges that we have to address with the sitting of this Legislature this fall. I would encourage the government to really tackle the deficit and the jobs crisis that we have here in Ontario. The tanning bed legislation and this legislation obviously serve an important part of this sitting, but we need to tackle the major issues.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further comments?

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: One of the interesting things about being in this Legislature is that there are some rare times when it sounds like we can work together. We should take those moments when we sound like we're working together and cherish those because that's something—I think we're setting an example of what we can do to really advance some meaningful legislation in this province.

The only thing is that while this legislation is certainly something that is helpful and it does bridge a gap that's missing, it is still just a narrow slice of a much bigger problem that we're facing, particularly when it comes to folks who are trapped in poverty. My colleague from Timiskaming–Cochrane talked about this: that many of the people who might really want to take advantage of the opportunity to leave their employment and take care of loved ones simply couldn't afford to take such a long time away from work because, in caring for one member of their family, they might fall back on providing for their family broadly in being able to pay the bills.

Again, with the health care issues that we're facing in this province, we need to look at different models of delivering health care. This was mentioned actually by a colleague from the Conservative Party. There are other models of delivery of health care that are efficient, that are more cost-effective and provide better care. One of those models—we talk about people who are critically ill—to prevent that from happening in the first place, health promotion could be a very important area where we need to put more investment, and community health centres, centres where we can provide personalized care in a cost-effective manner, with that element of health promotion so that we can prevent illness before it happens. But there will always be sad times when people are critically ill and injured without any prevention that could have helped them, and in those cases we need to ensure that we provide more protection for those folks.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The member for Prince Edward–Hastings has two minutes to respond.

Mr. Todd Smith: Thank you to the member from Bramalea–Gore–Malton; also my friend from Lambton–Kent–Middlesex; the member from Kenora–Rainy River, who is absolutely correct—I did tend to wander a little bit off the subject matter—and I thank the Speaker for

the leeway and the leniency on the transient nature in which I brought forward my remarks here this afternoon. Also the member from Brampton West, who touched on some of the small business concerns—and while there are some concerns for small business, I don't want to give the member for Brampton West on the government side any kind of indication that this is a big issue on the radar for small business operators and owners in Ontario, because it certainly isn't. I think I made it quite clear that the big issues that small business owners are facing have to do with the rising cost of electricity, and it's not just small business owners but residential homeowners as well, especially those who are on fixed incomes or young families. Or overregulation. Those are the issues that are facing small business owners. We are the most overregulated, and we are dealing with the most red tape, of any jurisdiction in North America. Those are the big issues when it comes to small business.

Back to Bill 21 just for a moment—and I appreciate the remarks from my colleagues in the Legislature here this afternoon. By consistently pointing out, as we did back when it was Bill 30 in the previous session of the Legislature—we brought forward a lot of ideas and a lot of examples of where this legislation actually failed, and there was the incentive on the part of the government to actually introduce a better bill. I congratulate them on doing that, because Bill 21 is actually a better bill than Bill 30 was. What we're talking about here is discussing these types of bills in the Legislature, and then we'll do the same when we actually get to committee.

1730

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Pursuant to standing order 47(c), I am now required to interrupt the proceedings and announce that there has been more than six and one half hours of debate on the motion for second reading of this bill. This debate will therefore be deemed adjourned unless the government House leader specifies otherwise.

Hon. John Gerretsen: Thank you very much for your comments, Madam Speaker, but we would like the debate to continue because we think it's very, very important.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Thank you. Further debate.

Mr. John Vanthof: It is truly an honour to once again be able to stand up and speak on behalf of the people of Timiskaming—Cochrane. I'm not sure I fully agree with the Attorney General that we all really want to further debate this, because I think—

Hon. John Gerretsen: Well, then, sit down.

Mr. John Vanthof: No, I think there are points that have to be made. But we've all debated this bill—most of us—as Bill 30, and then the government was prorogued. Now it's being brought back, with some improvements, as Bill 21. But if you really think about it, if the government hadn't been prorogued, we could have moved this issue much quicker.

Hon. John Gerretsen: That's ancient history.

Mr. John Vanthof: No, it's fact. I'm not trying to be political about this, but for those people who are saying, "We have to push this much faster," we would have. In this corner of the House, we would have. We didn't have the opportunity.

This is an important bill, and what makes this bill important is—I'll just say, for the folks at home and for the folks in Timiskaming—Cochrane who have been wondering, listening to this sometimes this afternoon, it has strayed off course a few times. Speaker, be forewarned: I might do so myself a few times, but I'll try to stay on the subject.

This bill provides an unpaid job-protected leave of absence to provide care or support to certain family members who have a serious medical condition but are not at risk of death. That's pretty bland, but it's actually a very important bill. One of the most important things about bills like this is they affect and impact people. It impacts people directly. Sometimes we talk about creating laws that have a long-term, very high-level impact on somebody, but this one, if you have a sick family member—an elderly person in your family, your mom, your pop or your sick child—allows you to take unpaid leave to take care of your family. Basically, that's a good thing. I think we've all, on all sides of the House, in our own ways, said that that's a good thing.

But there are shortcomings with this bill. I think one of the biggest shortcomings is under the ESA—you're protected by the Employment Standards Act, but the people who really need the protection probably don't even know that the act exists. That's the problem, Speaker, because for a lot of people—you know what? The majority of employers are good, the majority of employees are good, and they try to work together. This has happened when I was an employer. We didn't work through the Employment Standards Act; we just worked it out. I pride myself—hopefully, I was a pretty good employer when I ran my dairy farm.

What this act is aimed for is people who—laws are always for the bad apples. You don't need to make a new law for the people who are going to do things the right way anyway. You need the law for the people who are the bad apples. The member from London—Fanshawe brought up a really good point earlier today, and I didn't hear anybody else bring it up. We're creating a new law under the Employment Standards Act—great—but at the same time we're slashing the number of people who enforce this act.

Interjection: So?

Mr. John Vanthof: So we create a new law on paper, but in reality we're not protecting the people. Because the people who really need it, who need those inspectors—if you're cutting inspectors at the same time, the act, to the people who really need the protection, doesn't mean that much. That's something we have to spend some time thinking about: It's one thing to create the law, but how is the law actually going to be enforced?

Hon. John Gerretsen: You've got the wrong talking points. That's on the other bill.

Mr. John Vanthof: No, no—no talking points at all.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: You have no talking points.

Mr. John Vanthof: I pride myself on not using too many talking points.

The member from London—Fanshawe brought it up, and it's a really good point: Create a law, fine, but what is the mechanism to make sure that people are going to be protected by that law? By saying we're making the Employment Standards Act stronger but at the same time saying—or not saying, but actually cutting the number of inspectors, that's a problem, a big problem.

Another big problem—regardless of whether it's the federal government or the provincial government, a lot of people—and we're fortunate. I'm sure most of us, probably all of us in this House are that fortunate that we could afford to take advantage of this act. And our staff could afford to take advantage of this. But there are a lot of people in this province, in the lower income brackets, that can't afford to take off these weeks of leave. It's just that the money is not there. Their job should be guaranteed, provided they understand how the act works, provided there is an inspector, but they can't afford to take the leave. This act does not touch that at all. And that's something—do we support it, do I support it? Yes. It's a step forward—a small step, a very small step. But that's a big problem. The people who can afford to take—and I'm going to repeat a few times, because it's one of the most crucial—because the people who can afford it don't need the act, really. It's the people who can't afford it. Because usually it's the people in the lower-income jobs who have the most problems with their employers, and those are the people who need the Employment Standards Act and those are the people who don't understand the act, and those are the people who are, quite frankly, so worried about their income and so worried about keeping their jobs that they would be afraid to challenge it in the first place. And these aren't talking points, these are very serious issues.

I'm glad this act is coming back. Is this act going to fix the problems that ail Ontario right now? No. But provided we make some good changes to it, this act might make some very big changes in people's lives. A lot of people have talked about it today, and I'm sure every family has had the experience when you get the call and your whole life changes because someone who was previously healthy is no longer. Your whole life changes. Everyone has had that call, you know. But can you imagine when you get that call and you've got a minimum wage job and it's there but you can't afford it. That, that, my friends, is incredibly tough.

I'm pretty happy I haven't strayed off the act at all, but I'm going to at the very end, Madam Speaker.

Mr. Todd Smith: Warning, warning, warning.

Mr. John Vanthof: Yes, warning, warning, warning.

The people in northern Ontario weren't that happy with the Common Sense Revolution when all the roads were downloaded to the municipalities to save the province money. So the quick solutions, like in Iroquois

Falls—Iroquois Falls has the most miles of roads per person in the province.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Really? There's a statistic.

Mr. John Vanthof: It is a statistic, but it's more than a statistic if you're the people of Iroquois Falls and you can't afford to fix your own roads anymore.

1740

Interjection.

Mr. John Vanthof: Oh, there are lots of cars that go on the road. But the people of Iroquois Falls also have to worry about health care and also have to worry about caring for their families—and with very high taxes. Those are some of the reasons why they might not be able to afford to take advantage of this. So we really have to make sure to do our best so that the people who truly need it, the lower-income brackets who truly need it, have access—true access, not just access on paper, but true access—to pieces of legislation like this.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Comments and questions?

Hon. John Gerretsen: I always enjoy listening to the member from Timiskaming—Cochrane. He speaks very passionately about the problems of the north and the problems of the people in his particular area.

But you know, the real dilemma we have is this on this particular bill. On the one hand, we get the Conservative Party saying, "Well, we kind of support the bill, but we are being unfair to employers; not that it's costing them any money, but if this family leave act were to go into operation, then in certain circumstances they may have to hire someone else to do the job of the person who's taking the unpaid leave." And on the other hand, we have the NDP basically saying, "Well, how could somebody take unpaid leave without getting some compensation for it because, obviously, it's costing that individual, if they are not getting any money in while they're having the unpaid leave?"

What I think we should recognize in this bill is that it's all about one principle, and that is, if there is a family situation that requires you to be with that family member at home, because of a sick child, because of a sick parent, you can take that leave for a certain period of time, depending upon what the circumstances are, anywhere from eight weeks to 30 weeks. You can take that leave, and your job is still protected. That's what this bill is all about.

It is not about compensating that individual for doing so; there may be other programs in place for that. And it's not about taking money away from the employer, because the employer doesn't have to pay the individual when they take their unpaid leave.

We've talked about this bill now for over seven hours, Speaker. Everybody kind of agrees with it. Let's get it to committee as soon as possible, and let's just get on with it.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further comments.

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: It's a pleasure to rise today to reflect on the comments that were shared and pointed out by our member from Timiskaming—Cochrane.

This bill is very interesting, the Employment Standards Amendment Act (Leaves to Help Families), when the biggest thing we can do to help families in Ontario today is making sure life is affordable. The member for Timiskaming—Cochrane's colleague from Kenora—Rainy River read in a lot of petitions today with concerns over the cost of energy, and we have to focus in on that.

We support this bill. We need to be doing right by our families in Ontario. They are being nickel-and-dimed to death with regard to the cost of living. Never before have there been more seniors in stress, and the stress I'm talking about is economic stress. They're finding it very, very difficult to make ends meet. They have a fixed income, and their bills just keep going through the roof because of this failed Liberal government's attempt to try and spend their way out to secure more votes so they can stay in power and cover things up. But, with that said—

Interjections.

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: With that said, we need to have a focus on Bill 21, and Bill 21 has to enable people to have the flexibility to care for their families at home.

You know, in rural Ontario, people have to leave their homes and leave their communities to find jobs. Guess what is happening as a result? Their families, their loved ones, their parents and their grandparents are being left to their own devices because, as I said, people in rural Ontario are leaving their communities to find jobs. Not only are they leaving their communities, they're having to leave Ontario because this government has run this province right into the ground, and we have to do right by our families.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further comments?

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: We've had a lot of discussion on the benefits of this bill. We've also had a lot of discussion on some of the shortcomings in the areas that we need to work on. One of the areas that I think we also should focus on, when we look at this—we're talking about not looking at things in isolation and looking at things in the broader picture; the solutions have to come from a broader picture. In this area, some of my colleagues in this House have spoken about it, but we can look to some collaborations with our federal counterparts to ensure that there is a national strategy on this as well. While we have old age security for folks who are older and they can be supported in that way, in the same manner, if we have a national strategy where we work in coordination, provincially and federally, to provide protection and support for those who do take the choice to care for loved ones, care for those who are critically ill—I was in Sweden recently, and Sweden has a very dynamic approach to this issue. In Sweden, members of the community, if they choose, can have a loved one care for someone in their family. An example that was given to me was, an individual I met said that his job was to care for a baby, and the baby was the daughter of his sister. So he's caring for his niece, providing care for her in a loving environment, from a loved one that the mother can trust, and that is something that's compensated by the state. So it's a way of delivering care

in a direct fashion without having the infrastructure of a daycare centre; a direct fashion of providing that care in a circumstance where the best care is care in the home. That's a very creative solution, a very creative strategy that creates jobs, but more importantly provides a meaningful way of providing support in the home. So that's a creative solution in Sweden. We could look to implementing something like that perhaps nationally, and provincially in Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further comments?

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: It's a pleasure to join the debate on Bill 21. I did listen to the comments of the member from Timiskaming—Cochrane. I think, for the most part, they were very well balanced and very well thought out. I think that this really speaks to a common value we have around this House. I think most people have said in their remarks that they support the bill, that they would like to see the bill move forward. There are all sorts of other comments that are added on after that, but I think they are superfluous to what we're really talking about today, and that is something that is really practical in a person's life. I think it's something that we can see in our own families. We can see the potential in it when this is happening to our constituents, when a tragedy strikes within the family, and all of a sudden things change. Obviously, at that point in time, when you start to pay attention to either somebody in your own family that needs your care full-time—you start to think about things like, "Do I have the security of income during that period of time?" What this does, in many ways, I think, with changes now that have taken place at the federal level—long-overdue changes—is bring the Employment Standards Amendment Act in Ontario into the same phase, into the same sphere as the changes that have been made for the federal leave so that Ontarians will be able to avail themselves of the benefits that are provided at the federal level.

The member spoke about, "What's the sense of making changes if you can't enforce them?" I think most people around the House would agree with that. We've just received, certainly in the province of Ontario, an annual funding increase of about \$3 million a year to hire more inspectors to actually enforce the Employment Standards Act. So the type of enforcement that the member was asking for is coming through in this year's budget. It's something that, when we approved the budget last spring, was included in there, so that should help, I think, in some regard.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The member has two minutes to respond.

Mr. John Vanthof: I'd like to thank the Attorney General, the member from Huron—Bruce, my colleague from Bramalea—Gore—Malton and the member from Oakville.

I think we're at the point where most of us agree we should move forward with this—and I'm not going to get into playing with numbers games about how we cut last year out of this year.

I would like to—

Interjection.

1750

Mr. John Vanthof: I would like to comment specifically on the Attorney General because he's one of my favourite—

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: Hecklers.

Mr. John Vanthof: Hecklers? Of course. But he's a fellow Dutchman, and it's hard to hold it against a Dutchman.

The member from Huron-Bruce always focuses on rural issues. The member from Bramalea-Gore-Malton always has a personal touch. I would like to look at the numbers with the member from Oakville, but at the end of the day, it's our hope that this doesn't become a political "Look what we did" as opposed to how we could help people, because at the end of the day, the people in this corner of the House want to deliver results, real results for people—not just press conferences, not just announcements. We want real results. I think we've set the standard pretty high, and on this one and a lot of other bills, people want less politics. They want to be represented and they want things like the Financial Accountability Office, lower car insurance, the five-day home care guarantee, and they want to make sure that that money doesn't get sucked out from somewhere else. Those are the things that are important to people, and those are the things that this Legislature has to work on to get done.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further debate?

Hon. David Zimmer: It's my pleasure to join in the debate, and I'm glad that all parties seem to be in agreement that this legislation should move through.

We have heard a lot of technical discussion, we've heard a lot of discussion about what the act says and what section so-and-so says, and what other sections say. But I thought, Madam Speaker, it may be useful for the viewing audience if I were to actually walk through a couple of scenarios about what this legislation—how it would actually play out in real, living circumstances. So I'm going to walk you through three scenarios.

Scenario number one: This is how the legislation would actually play out in the real world, in the real world of family life. Here's the scenario: An employee who works for an employer that regularly employs 50 or more employees takes up to 10 personal emergency leave days to deal with a medical emergency of a child under the age of 18. As a result of the medical emergency, the child is diagnosed with a serious medical condition, making the employee eligible to take up to eight weeks of the proposed family caregiver leave.

What happens next? Well, at the end of the eight-week period, the child in our scenario receives a diagnosis of being critically ill, entitling the employee to take up to 37 weeks of the proposed critically ill child care leave. After 37 weeks, the child receives a diagnosis of having a serious medical condition with a significant risk of death within 26 weeks, entitling the employee to take up to eight weeks of family medical leave. So in this scenario, when you track that scenario through, the employee in

this situation would be entitled to a leave of a total of 55 weeks. That's the progression.

Let me walk you through another example, because I think these examples help the public to actually understand how the legislation plays out, as I said, in the real world. So we take that same employee that I mentioned in my first scenario. That employee, wishing to take leave to care for a relative, other than a child, in a similar situation as in scenario 1, could take up to 10 personal emergency leave days, up to eight weeks of proposed family caregiver leave and up to eight weeks of family medical leave. So in this scenario, the employee could be on leave for a total of 18 weeks. That's how it actually plays out in the real world.

I'll give you one more scenario. I'll refer to this as scenario three. The same employee that I just referenced in my earlier example, wishing to take leave to cope with the crime-related death or disappearance of his or her child under the age of 18, could take up to 10 personal emergency leave days, followed by the proposed crime-related child death or disappearance leave—that's up to 52 weeks in the case of a disappearance or up to 104 weeks in the case of a death. In the case of a crime-related child disappearance, this employee could be on leave for a total of 54 weeks. In the case of a crime-related child death, the employee could be on leave for a total of 106 weeks. So that's how the legislation actually plays out in real-life circumstances.

Madam Speaker, this legislation is about compassion for the pain and the suffering that families go through in these tragic circumstances. I referenced the three examples that I've just given. I think we all agree in this chamber that, in the examples that I've just given, the heart cries out to provide that kind of relief for the family. In short, it's the right thing to do.

I suppose, at another level, when a family is in crisis as a result of these situations, particularly the three examples that I've referenced, really, I think what we all want to do as legislators, what we all want to do as citizens, what we all want to do as human beings, is to ensure that those families, when they're working through that crisis, when they're dealing with the grief and the shock and the pain—that we do whatever we can to help them achieve a certain peace of mind.

If passed, this bill will recognize the importance of family, and it will recognize the importance of job security to families, by creating these unpaid, job-protected leaves for hard-working Ontarians.

Can you imagine being a parent, a brother, a sister, a grandmother, a family member, and you're dealing with the grief and the pain of one of these situations that the bill references, and at the same time, while you want to deal with this and deal with your other family members in pain and you want to spend time with them, you're afraid that if you do take that time, if you're away, you might lose your job—your job might disappear? A family in grief, a person in grief—what we have an obligation to do is to lessen that grief in whatever way we can, to help them to deal with that grief. That's what this legislation is designed to do.

I think back to August 2011, when this government announced a proposal to create the family caregiver leave. That was a campaign promise that this government made in 2011. We reiterated our support with a campaign promise in our Liberal platform at the time. We introduced the bill last fall. Last fall it received all-party support to go to committee, but it died with the prorogation. In January 2013, our action plan for seniors also announced that we would be reintroducing the legislation, which would, if passed, give this unpaid, job-protected time away from work to care for a family member with serious medical conditions. This is a campaign commitment that we are keeping. It was a commitment that we made going back to 2011.

I have to say, from listening to the debate here for the afternoon, I am so pleased that this is an example—I might say “a rare example,” but it should be an ideal that we should all be working for—of how all three parties can muster around a piece of legislation that can only have a beneficial effect on Ontarians. I think it’s something that all members of this House, be they Liberal, Conservative or NDP, want for their constituents. We’re all hearing from our constituents that they want this type of legislation to help them through these grieving times. As I’ve said before, I am so pleased that the three parties, it appears from the debate, are coming together, and we all agree that this legislation should go forward.

I make those comments because I throw it out as a challenge to all the members of this Legislature, from the three parties, that we should use the way we’ve come together on this bill as a model for how we should come together on a whole host of other things that are pending before this House and that should be dealt with by this House. I think when the public sees how the parties appear to be coming together on this piece of legislation, they probably ask themselves, when they’ve been watching this place on the parliamentary channel for the last six, seven or eight months and have seen the wrangling and some of the discord here, why we can’t get together on other useful, meaningful, required legislation and deal with it in the same spirit that we’ve dealt with this piece of legislation.

This legislation is good for families. It’s good for people in grief. It’s something that’s needed. It’s something that’s wanted, and it’s something that we’ve finally come together on and are providing for the members of the public.

I throw out this challenge: Why can’t we do what we’ve done on this bill on other things that we should be acting on?

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Thank you. It being 6 of the clock, this House stands adjourned until 9 a.m. tomorrow.

The House adjourned at 1802.

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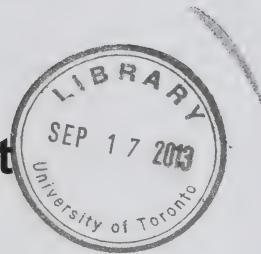
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Second Session, 40th Parliament

Assemblée législative
de l'Ontario

Deuxième session, 40^e législature

**Official Report
of Debates
(Hansard)**



**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

Wednesday 11 September 2013

Mercredi 11 septembre 2013

Speaker
Honourable Dave Levac

Président
L'honorable Dave Levac

Clerk
Deborah Deller

Greffière
Deborah Deller

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Wednesday 11 September 2013

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Mercredi 11 septembre 2013

The House met at 0900.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Good morning. Please join me in prayer.

Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

FINANCIAL ACCOUNTABILITY OFFICER ACT, 2013

LOI DE 2013 SUR LE DIRECTEUR DE LA RESPONSABILITÉ FINANCIÈRE

Mr. Milloy, on behalf of Mr. Sousa, moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 95, An Act to establish a Financial Accountability Officer / Projet de loi 95, Loi créant le poste de directeur de la responsabilité financière.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Mr. Milloy.

Hon. John Milloy: It's a pleasure to kick off the debate on government order G95. Just to remind members, the actual debate of this legislation, the Financial Accountability Officer legislation, is under a slightly different format right now because of a motion that was passed by this House in June, which was tied to the budget deliberations. Members may recall a programming motion that outlined a series of steps to be taken to pass the budget bill and that also called on the government to introduce legislation on the whole issue of a Financial Accountability Officer as soon as we returned from the summer break.

So the bill that my colleague the Minister of Finance introduced on Monday reflects the motion that was passed by this House, and outlines what the terms of a Financial Accountability Officer would be. It also, as I say, follows a different format, in that there will be a prescribed period of debate here, and then, should it pass second reading, a prescribed period of debate at both committee and, should it be successful there, at third reading.

Very briefly, the Financial Accountability Officer is in many ways the mirror image of the Auditor General, another officer of this Legislature. While the Auditor General takes a look at initiatives and undertakings by the government at the end of the process and reports his or her findings, the role of the Financial Accountability Officer—similar to what we saw in Ottawa through the formation of the Parliamentary Budget Officer—would look at initiatives and undertakings at the beginning of

the process and report on his findings of the costs and some of the implications that are involved.

I must say that when this idea was first raised around the time of the budget negotiations—in fact, we will be the only province in Canada to have such a budget officer, such a parliamentary officer—I think there was a great deal of enthusiasm on our side of the House.

Mr. Speaker, no one likes an Auditor General's report that comes out with criticisms and concerns about an initiative. I think any minister who is in that position, any government that's in that position, says to itself, "I wish there was someone at the beginning, a neutral third party, whom we could have gone to, to get the type of advice and input that would have allowed us to foresee any of the challenges or problems that arose."

So that, very simply, is the role of this Financial Accountability Officer. He or she will be an officer of the Legislature, will be chosen if the legislation passes through the usual process, will be another step toward a more open and accountable government and, I think, will be an aid to the government of the day and obviously an aid to every member of the Legislature. Because the other piece of the puzzle is that MPPs here in the House can prevail upon this officer of the Legislature to get his or her advice on private members' bills, and obviously on government initiatives and on a range of issues that face the government.

Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure to kick off the discussion today. As I said, it's going to be slightly different because it has been prescribed by the order, but I look forward to a good debate over the course of the next day or so. Certainly we, on this side of the House, are very enthusiastic about supporting this piece of legislation.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Further debate?

Mr. John Yakabuski: It's a pleasure to join this limited debate on this piece of legislation brought forward by the Liberals as a quid pro quo for the NDP's support in propping up their tired, old, corrupt government through the last budget session. In fact, the NDP made it clear: They went public and said, "We will support this government even though we think it's corrupt, bordering on evil. We will support it. We will support it if you give us this."

Now I must say that I detect just a faint aroma of buyer's remorse on the part of the NDP. However, that could just be that PR stuff going on again; you know, that messaging for the public where Andrea Horwath, the leader of the third party, stands up in the Legislature and berates the government for the corrupt way they are behaving but—nudge, nudge, wink, wink—says, "If there's

more on the table, you guys will stay in power. Don't worry about it. We hate you, but we don't hate you that much."

It's interesting how the political system works sometimes, Mr. Speaker. You see the government House leader there, talking about this legislation. He's almost an apologist; he's almost like, "Well, we had to do it." But when you look at the legislation itself, ask yourself, what is it really accomplishing? I'll tell you one thing.

Mr. Jonah Schein: It's about accountability.

Mr. John Yakabuski: I'll tell you what I say to the member for Davenport: Accountability starts right here, right here in this Legislature. It's about time that maybe the government was accountable for its actions.

Now, I've read this bill, and it's a pretty thin gruel. I'll tell you one thing: There is nothing in this bill, not a smidgen of any indication in this bill, that had this bill been passed 10 years ago, almost 10 years ago on that ill-fated day when Dalton McGuinty seized the premiership in this province and began to take us down the pathway to ruin, financially—there is nothing in this bill that would prevent another \$1-billion to \$2-billion eHealth scandal. Nothing would prevent that. Nothing would prevent that. There is nothing in this bill that would prevent another billion-dollar scandal like Ornge. Nothing in this bill would prevent an eHealth or an Ornge scandal, and maybe we're going to talk a little bit more about those if I have time. How much time do I have?

Interjection.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Oh, my goodness gracious.

Mr. John O'Toole: You only have 10 minutes.

Mr. John Yakabuski: My deputy whip says I have 10 minutes; the clock says I've got 36. I'd better listen to him.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Well, the sheriff's back in town. It appears that we've got about nine sidebars going on, and I would like to hear what the member from Renfrew has to say.

I would also appreciate if people would not forget to acknowledge the Chair when you come in and out of this chamber. I would appreciate it. Also, further to that, any members who are talking out loud might want to get back in their seats. Thank you very much.

The member from Renfrew, continue.

0910

Mr. John Yakabuski: Thank you very much, Speaker. I would certainly appreciate that myself as well today, because you may be able to tell that my voice is a little bit weak today, and I don't want to strain it unduly trying to keep above the din of my friends in the third party. They're a noisy group.

As I said, nothing in here is going to prevent eHealth or Ornge, and is there anything in this piece of legislation that would have prevented the government, in the dying days of the 2011 election, in order to save the seats of many of their members in Etobicoke and Mississauga and Oakville—is there anything in there that will prevent them from once again subjecting us to what we know

now today is at least a \$585-million bill? And when that auditor's report comes out, whenever that happens—we're hoping it comes out maybe before Christmas, if the Premier doesn't try and bury it. That bill could likely go to maybe \$800 million, maybe \$1 billion. Is there anything in this legislation that would prevent a tired, corrupt, self-serving government from doing that again? Nothing—nothing, I say, Mr. Speaker, in there that would prevent this government from doing exactly what it did before.

Listen, there is nobody, nobody, no party that is more committed to accountability than the Progressive Conservative Party of Ontario under our leader, Tim Hudak. In spite of the fact that they're going ahead with this placating legislation to satisfy the NDP, accountability starts with the 107 members of this Legislature—pardon me; it starts with the government, because they're the ones with the hand on the wheel, and it extends to the 107 members of this Legislature. We have a responsibility to be vigilant in watching the government. We will continue to do our part to ensure that the taxpayers of Ontario are represented well in this Legislature, that their financial interests are paramount when it comes to the actions of this Legislature.

In spite of this legislation that they're bringing forth today, I question the commitment to accountability of this government. In fact, they're still spending it the same way. Isn't it lovely that Kathleen Wynne's transition officer, Monique Smith, gets a nice appointment to Washington, with cushy surroundings—little to do, but lots of money to be paid. Where's the accountability there? Where are the savings elsewhere in the budget that pay for "Ms. Smith goes to Washington"? I guess we're going to get a movie out of that, maybe.

Speaker, this government continues to behave exactly the way it did before. It will continue to behave this way after this accountability officer is appointed, because they know only one way. Whatever it takes to keep the Liberal Party in power is what they will do, and the interests of the Ontario public be damned. That's the way they behave. Shame on them. It's got to change.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Further debate?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: I'm very proud and pleased to be able to make a few remarks on the second reading of the Financial Accountability Office legislation. It's interesting: In spite of Liberal sabre-rattling in the last couple of days, they really wouldn't have much to talk about if it wasn't for the New Democrats. I think that's obvious even today, with the second reading of this bill. The fact is the Liberals have laid out some priorities for this session: for example, cutting auto insurance premiums; for example, getting young people back to work; for example, creating a Financial Accountability Office. I have to say that these things have one primary thing in common, and that is that they were all put forward by the NDP. Speaker, I would put to you and to this House that, in fact, the Liberal government doesn't really have an agenda, but we were happy to give them some ideas to

cobble something together for the people of this province this fall.

So what we're doing, what New Democrats are doing, is we are going to be rolling up our sleeves and we're going to do the hard work of actually leading in this province: making sure Ontarians are getting some results on the issues that concern them; making sure that the promises are kept to young people, to be able to get their first crack at a decent job; making sure auto insurance rates actually do come down and are not just another promise by a Liberal government that's more interested in lining the pockets of the industry than they are about protecting wallets of drivers; making sure that people get the home care that they deserve in this province.

For years and years now, I'm sure every MPP, regardless of which side of the House they sit on, has received horrifying complaints about the way that their loved ones are being passed over, if you will, when it comes to needed home care services. That is not acceptable. That has to stop, and New Democrats are the ones who are going to make sure that the home care system is improved so that people can get the care that they need for their vulnerable relatives when they need it, at an appropriate time.

Of course, what we're talking about today is the Financial Accountability Office. Now, this office isn't for the NDP, it's not for the PCs, it's not for the Liberals. This office is an office for the people of Ontario.

One of the things we heard very loudly and clearly in the discussions that we engaged in with Ontarians over the course of the budget process was that they were fed up with the Liberals' track record. They were very, very cynical—had become very cynical—about the Liberal scandals that continued to unfold over the last decade. What does that look like? I'm going to give you just a couple of examples, and they don't even really, I don't think, reflect a number of other things that have occurred.

For example: hundreds of millions of dollars wasted at Ornge, so that a well-connected Liberal insider could build an empire that quickly fell apart and left egg on the face of the government; a billion dollars wasted at eHealth and no electronic health records system to show for it, certainly not in a timely fashion; hundreds of millions of dollars wasted on gas plants that needed to be moved because the arrogance of Mr. McGuinty and Mr. Duncan refused to pay attention to the real situation that the people in those ridings were concerned about. They ignored the people because they had ultimate power. Then when they saw their power possibly slipping away is when they decided they were going to move those gas plants—not because of what the people wanted, not because of the impacts on community, not because of what mayors were saying, but because it threatened their political power. How shameful.

Broken promises are a big, big issue here in this province, and they have been for years. We've watched as Liberals have broken promise after promise after promise after promise. Liberals, for example, said the HST would not cost families, but actually, it cost families about

\$1,500 annually, each—\$1,500. That's, from the Liberals' calculation, a no-cost deal for families. I think families see it a little bit differently.

Now we're waiting to hear the new plan that the Liberals have to increase the costs on families again with taxes and tolls that could actually cost them another \$1,000 annually—money that they simply don't have.

So as people lose trust in a government that is cynical, that is politically self-interested, that seems to only be able to make decisions that are going to affect them positively and simply ignore the realities and the concerns that everyday families have, what we believe is that we have to start rebuilding trust. We have to start rebuilding trust, because the cynicism out there is thick. The way you do that is you start to bring some real accountability to this place.

Now, I know that the previous speaker railed on about how you can just trust the PCs to be able to bring some trust back here, bring some accountability back here. Well, I'm sorry; I think it's quite obvious—in fact, just over the last week or so, if I dare say—that that's actually not the case, and it has been proven quite clearly. What I think we need to recognize and acknowledge, though, is that there are tools of accountability that can be brought to bear here, and those tools of accountability can be brought to bear not just on this government with its horrible, horrible track record, but also any on political party that forms the government in this province.

0920

So it's not just the current, reigning Liberals, but the New Democrats, when we're to form a government; if the PCs were to form a government. Any government in this province would now have the extra accountability that comes with the Financial Accountability Office, and we are very, very proud of that.

You know, it's pretty interesting, Speaker: The Liberals talk a good game when it comes to transparency, but what they really continue to do—and we saw it again yesterday in question period from the Premier—is that they continue to keep trying to protect their political insiders. It's very, very obvious. The Conservatives: Well, they make a lot of noise, but they really can't seem to get anything done around here. It's New Democrats who are delivering real transparency in this province, and Ontario will judge politicians based on what they do, not just what they say.

What do they do? The Liberals will spend anything, and it's not their money they're spending. They will spend anything in terms of the public dollar to try to get elected. The Conservatives? They're stuck on the sidelines, and if they had their way, Ontario wouldn't have a Financial Accountability Office. New Democrats take a different view. We are the ones who are actually going to be delivering the results on the Financial Accountability Office.

So what is it? The government House leader downplayed the importance of this office; I notice he didn't really speak about it very much at all. This is an extremely important office. In fact, this is an office that is so

useful and so diligent in the work it can do that Stephen Harper actually wanted to get rid of the one it's modeled after in Ottawa, called the parliamentary budget office. It's no wonder that the provincial PCs, cousins of the federal PCs, don't want to see a Financial Accountability Office in Ontario, because their friend Stephen Harper didn't like the one in Ottawa.

What we did is we looked at that office, the parliamentary budget office in Ottawa. We looked at that, and we spoke to Kevin Page, the person Mr. Harper ran out on a rail. We asked him, "How do you make that parliamentary budget office better?" So not only did we take the model from Ottawa, but we wanted to make sure that we learned the lessons about what had gone wrong in Ottawa and tried to improve what we brought forward for Ontarians.

What the office was able to do in Ottawa, even though it probably wasn't as effective as it could have been—the reason it wasn't is because Mr. Harper refused to provide documents that were requested by the officer, something we're not going to allow to happen here in Ontario.

The Harper Conservatives claimed that buying F-35 fighter jets was going to cost \$9 billion; the people of Canada would be on the hook for \$9 billion to buy F-35 jets. The parliamentary budget office, in advance of that transaction being finalized, did the work, did the research—uncovered the truth, if you will—about what the actual cost of the F-35 contracts was going to be. Lo and behold, the figure that the Parliamentary Budget Officer, Mr. Page, came up with was \$30 billion—more than \$30 billion. So a minimum of three times more is what the parliamentary budget office pegged the cost at.

You can imagine that Mr. Harper was not happy with that. He was not happy with the accountability and the truth coming out. So you can see why the provincial Conservatives here would have a similar dislike for that kind of transparency, if you will.

The Harper government also claimed that old age security was unsustainable in this country. This was a claim of the Conservatives, because it was their political agenda to start getting rid of old age security in the country. What did the parliamentary budget office see when they looked into it? The parliamentary budget office showed that in fact the Conservatives were not being truthful with the people of the country. In fact, old age security was sustainable and is sustainable, and today it still is sustainable.

What that did—and I'm hoping that there are some seniors out there right now who are watching this—is it basically saved Canada's old age security system, a system that seniors rely on to a great deal and that we want to make sure seniors of the future are going to be able to rely on as well. The only reason it was saved in Canada is because the parliamentary budget office unveiled the lack of efficacy, if you will, in the figures and the plans that the federal Conservatives were bringing forward.

What's another lesson that we learned from the parliamentary budget office when we looked at how it could apply to Ontario? We found that in fact even though Mr.

Harper did create the parliamentary budget office, as I said earlier, he refused to respond to requests for information and release of documents that were sent to him. So what we did, when we looked at the Financial Accountability Office here in Ontario, is we insisted that our Financial Accountability Office be able to order access to documents, plain and simple. We're going to make sure that the Financial Accountability Office has access to all of the documents that it needs to get the job done—again, not to get the job done for the government and not to get the job done for the PCs or for us, but to get the job done for the people of this province.

What else? The parliamentary budget office showed that independence, being independent from the political influence of the government or any other political party, was essential. So we made sure that the Financial Accountability Office would be an independent office that was not subject to political pressure from the government particularly or either of the other political parties.

So what kind of impact could the FAO have here in Ontario? What kinds of things could have been avoided? A Financial Accountability Office is a practical, reasonable solution to a real problem that we have here in this province, because what it does is it provides forward-looking assessments—I think the government House leader mentioned that in his remarks—of government plans, government ideas and government announcements so that we know for sure whether or not the government is putting forward something that's laden with a whole lot of spin and a whole lot of underestimating in terms of costs, or if in fact the real deal is being presented to the public.

Those forward-looking assessments will help us to prevent the kinds of scandals that have happened here in Ontario from happening again. It will help us save precious public dollars from being wasted on either political opportunism or simply half-baked plans that the Liberals are so famous for bringing forward. They're tired of governments saying one thing about the books when the truth is really something quite different. Every year the government, for example, gives us unreal deficit projections so that of course then they can beat those projections. It's all a bit of a game and everybody laughs and the press gallery chuckles, but the bottom line is it's really not fair to the people of this province to set out unrealistic numbers, to play a silly game to then pretend that you're doing so much better than even you projected you were going to do. Let's grow up about it and be honest with the people about what the numbers are so that we can all kind of get behind some of the initiatives to deal with the pressures we have in this province.

The government consistently lowballs and misleads about costs. The gas plants, for example—they claimed it was going to be \$230 million: \$40 million for Oakville and \$190 million for Mississauga. Now, the auditor showed, again in hindsight, that the costs were much, much higher than that. When the Oakville report comes out within the next several weeks, I believe, we're probably going to see even a higher figure than what we see now.

The cost of nuclear refurbishment—again, the government lowballs that figure on a consistent basis, to try to pretend that somehow the costs aren't really there.

Saving the ONTC: The government inflated the costs of saving the ONTC because their political agenda was to get rid of the Ontario Northland, to cut all of those people from the north out of their passenger rail system.

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The real cost of secretive private power contracts: We consistently have been pushing the government to unveil the costs of their secret private power deals. Samsung was, of course, the biggest one. But we've been consistently FOIing the cost of these private power deals. In fact, if we'd have had that information, we might not be in the soup that we're in when it comes to the Oakville and Mississauga gas plants.

The PC government, if we want to go back a little ways, did the same thing. They handed away the 407 for a short-term gain, a short-term communications win with the people of this province. The PCs can ask anybody if they think that Ontario got a good deal when it comes to them handing the 407 over to a private consortium. Most people would say, "No, that was not a good deal." If the Financial Accountability Office were up and running in Ontario when they made that pretty stupid decision, we wouldn't have had it happen, because the people would have seen what the reality was behind the suggestions that the Conservatives brought forward at the time, that this was the right thing to do.

One more example: In 2011, a lot of people wanted me to say that I would agree to the gas plant cancellations. We were on the campaign trail; the pressure was enormous. As a political leader, I was scurried by the media and I was asked, "Will you cancel those gas plants?" I said I will not tear up a contract that I have not seen and that I don't know what the financial implications are. That's what I said on the campaign trail. That's what's on the public record; that's what's on the media record. I said that because I watched as the Conservatives talked about tearing up the Samsung deal, not knowing at all what the cost of tearing up that deal would be. For some time, New Democrats have said that one of the things we have to be careful about is tearing up contracts sight unseen because we don't know what the implications of those things are going to be. I think that one of the things we know for sure is that the Financial Accountability Office will help us to be able to get a handle on what the implications of some of those decisions will be in the future.

So in conclusion, what this will do is it will give the Legislature and Ontarians access to real costs and independent assessments of the plans that this government is making and that all future governments are going to make. This will stop waste; I have no doubt in my mind that this will stop waste in this province.

What it will also do is—I believe and I certainly hope—it will help people to start having some more trust in government again, starting to restore the sense of trust in government. I think that's the bigger piece of what this

legislation does. I can tell you, everywhere I go, that's what I hear from everyone: "You can't trust any of them. You can't trust the Liberals. You can't trust the government. You can't trust any government." Of course, what we've seen with what's happened federally with the Senate—we've seen some of the municipalities go through some pretty amazing shenanigans, we've seen what's happened with the shenanigans of the Liberals here governing in Ontario. People are just fed up. They don't believe that they can trust government anymore. And it's our job not to flap our mouths about accountability, not to pretend that we're transparent and accountable because we say it, but to actually do something to bring accountability to this Legislature. I'm glad that that's exactly what we are going to do.

New Democrats brought this idea here to Ontario. We're proud that we're debating it today, and we look forward to the day that this legislation is passed, which will be coming very, very soon.

But I do want to say that we're going to look closely at the details of the bill because we want to make sure that the government doesn't try to water it down, that the government doesn't try to manipulate things so that it doesn't actually do the kinds of things that it has the great potential to do, which I spoke about in my remarks.

We're also going to be letting people have their say when it comes to the public hearings process because I think that there are things that are always added that are positive when it comes to public hearings, because ultimately it's the public that we're putting this in place for. It's their legislation. This is their House, and it's up to us to make sure that they're welcomed in to participate in the process of putting—particularly this piece of legislation, which is going to help them, I hope, to rebuild their trust in government.

So, Speaker, I want to thank you very much for the opportunity, and again New Democrats are very, very proud of this Financial Accountability Office legislation.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Further debate?

Mr. Steven Del Duca: It is a pleasure for me to be here, this being our first week back in the Legislature after our summer recess. Of course, as parliamentary assistant to our Minister of Finance, I am very pleased, very privileged, to stand here in my place in the House for second reading of the Financial Accountability Officer Act, 2013.

There's a lot of stuff that I do want to say with respect to the contents of the bill, but I couldn't help but pay close attention to what I heard from both the member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke and the leader of the third party.

I think I'd like to begin my remarks today by perhaps saying a couple of things to preface the elements of the bill itself that I know deserve the support of this Legislature.

First of all, of course, I'd like to say to Premier Wynne, to Minister Sousa, to our government, generally speaking: Congratulations on moving forward with this

initiative. It's a very important initiative that's going to help ensure that this Legislative Assembly can provide the level of fiscal transparency and accountability, going forward, that the people of Ontario have every right to expect.

I also do want to spend just a second talking a little bit about the process that led to this being included in budget 2013 and specifically give, I suppose, a little bit of credit to our friends in the third party, not with specific regard to this particular element, because the leader of the third party did speak to that at length, but the general notion that underpinned that sense of collaborative interest and spirit during the course of the budget deliberations back in the late winter and early spring.

When I think of the conversations that I had the chance to have over the course of the summer with many members of my community, I think it's quite telling to hear from people living in Vaughan and business owners living in Vaughan, who watched very closely the budget deliberation and the process back in the spring, the stark contrast between the way that the members of the third party and the leadership of the third party dealt with trying to move the agenda forward positively for Ontarians, working closely with our government, standing in stark contrast to what we saw from the members of the official opposition, the leader of the official opposition, who took a very unfortunate, very strident position very early on in the process, saying that that party—I think very, very unfortunately, Speaker—had no interest in participating in a collaborative or constructive way to try to move agenda items forward that might be of interest to their constituencies, to their way of thinking. The fact that there was no desire to play any meaningful, cooperative role and make sure that Ontario's economy stays on track, continues to perform as well as it has in the last couple of years, I think, was extremely unfortunate.

I should say that both in conversations I had with residents of Vaughan and also in conversations that I had at events like the AMO conference in Ottawa and elsewhere over the course of the summer, it was very clear that there is a great deal of disappointment that members from the official opposition, the leadership of the official opposition, did not see fit to try to play a constructive role.

I did speak a second ago about the importance of moving forward with items like this, like the Financial Accountability Officer, because of the importance of making sure that we provide the level of transparency and accountability that people across Ontario expect and deserve. But I think it's important to put the right historical context into play in the course of this discussion, this debate at second reading.

I know that the member of the Ontario PC caucus who spoke earlier and the leader of the third party did reference their version of history, but I think it's important to recognize that the proposal to create this particular position with this legislation is in fact a very natural evolutionary step for the Ontario Liberal government.

When you track back—in fact, it's probably hard for many observers out there who haven't been following politics closely for the last number of years, or perhaps people who are in their late twenties or early thirties, who were a great deal younger back in the early to mid-to late 1990s—it's probably very hard for individuals like that to recall that we once had a government in Ontario that saw fit to go into an election campaign and not to reveal to the people of Ontario that there was close to a \$6-billion deficit that was looming. In fact, the government of the day back in 2002-03, acted in a way that was completely unacceptable.

It's important to note for the historical context of this bill and this position of the Financial Accountability Officer that in introducing the 2004 Fiscal Transparency and Accountability Act, this government, the Ontario Liberal government, made sure that that would be fixed, that it could never happen again that a government would head into an election campaign not being straightforward and honest with the people of Ontario.

Again, residents in my riding, people who don't pay that close attention to politics or who might be a bit younger, probably have virtually no recollection that there was a time in Ontario when a government of the day would spend tens and tens of millions of taxpayers' dollars on government advertising that actually saw fit to put forward or promote their own partisan interests. That's another example, Mr. Speaker. In 2004 this government, the Ontario Liberal government, fixed that with the Government Advertising Act, to make sure that misusing taxpayers' dollars for government advertising to promote partisan purposes could no longer take place.

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There are other examples in the course of this evolution that I'm talking about to put this particular bill in its historical context. We've improved issues relating to procurement and expenses by increasing the transparency of government agencies. Just last year, Speaker, we dramatically enhanced the reporting and disclosure of salaries components of the Public Sector Salary Disclosure Act.

We did these things, and we've done many, many more over the course of the last number of years, because, as I said at the outset of my remarks, it's important that the people of Ontario understand their taxpayers' dollars, their dollars, are being spent wisely. That's what's important to the people of my community, and frankly, it's important to myself and to my wife and our own household as we seek to make sure that we are spending appropriately in our own household, making the investments we need to make. It's important that Ontarians see that their government is doing that, and that's why we have moved forward; we included it in the budget this past spring and we're moving forward with this particular legislation.

In terms of one of the other reasons we do these things, it's to make sure that Ontario's economy, which is so important to so many other things that we want to accomplish, continues to move along the right track. I said this just a couple of minutes ago. I think there's fair-

ly strong evidence—in fact, some that was just presented yesterday by Minister Sousa—that we are, both in the economy but in so many other areas, moving in the right direction. Just yesterday, when Minister Sousa presented the public accounts for the year 2012-13, he was, I know, delighted to reveal that Ontario's deficit now stands at \$9.2 billion. That is \$5.6 billion lower than was projected in the 2012 budget and a further reduction of \$600 million since the 2013 budget.

It was also interesting to note in that reporting of public accounts that, for the first time in more than a decade, total government reported spending fell from the previous year. At \$122.6 billion, spending was just under \$4 billion less than was planned in the 2012 budget. We see evidence of the positive results that this is having for the people of Ontario and for the economy of Ontario. We see the real gross domestic product is now 2.7% above its pre-recession peak. And perhaps what is the most important indicator to the people living in all of our communities across the province: Ontario has created more than 477,000 jobs, nearly half a million jobs, since June 2009, which means that we have recovered all of the jobs lost during the recession, and in fact the current level of employment here in the province of Ontario is more than 210,000 jobs above the high point before the recession.

So I think it's very, very important to make sure that we at all times in this discussion and debate keep one eye on that historical context that I talked about, and take into account that this is a very positive evolutionary step in making sure that we, on this side of the House, working with both other parties and working with people across Ontario through extensive consultations, keep our eye on the ball, that we keep moving forward and keep finding creative ways to make sure that people's tax dollars are being spent wisely. As I said, the Financial Accountability Officer is the next step. We are definitely on the right track.

There are some elements with respect to the office itself that I think bear mentioning. I believe some of this discussion came up when the leader of the third party was making her remarks. It's important to note that there are various aspects of this office, this officer, this position that we are proposing in the legislation. First of all, it's very, very important to note—and I know the government House leader did say this—that this legislation proposes that this position of the Financial Accountability Officer will be an independent officer of the Legislature. That's extremely important. I think that's what the people of my riding and the people across Ontario expect. They want someone in this role who is not going to be reporting specifically to one government, one party of the day. I know the leader of the third party did reference this.

It is important that we create a position in the most appropriate way possible to make sure that it provides sustainable support to the Ontario Legislature regardless of who's in power, regardless of what stripe the particular party in power may have. That's why it's very, very

important that he or she, whoever the person might be, if this bill is passed, is an independent officer of this chamber, this Legislature—and to take into account that being an independent officer of the Legislature, he or she will be in a position to serve all members of provincial Parliament, regardless of whether they got elected just a few weeks ago; whether they've been here for many, many years; whether they're Liberal, they're NDP or they're Conservative. This independent officer of the Legislature will serve all MPPs. He or she will be able to assist committees and provide MPPs with financial research regarding, for example, the costs or the benefits of public bills.

These are just some of the examples that are provided for in this legislation, Mr. Speaker, again, with an interest to make sure that we are creating a position that will provide sustainable support to this Legislature at the same time as having the impact of making sure that the people of Ontario, people in my riding, people who I heard from over the course of the summer, are aware of the fact that we are moving forward in a manner to try to make sure that their tax dollars are spent appropriately.

I do want to spend just a quick second talking a little bit about the selection process itself. Of course, in order to make sure that you produce a final product, be it in construction, be it anywhere else, you want to make sure that the architecture and the engineering is sound. When you look at the proposed selection process in this legislation, I think we can see that the plan is to move forward with a selection process that will be robust, that will avoid any criticism, unfounded or otherwise, with respect to how we arrive at selecting a particular person to take on this position, should the legislation pass. It's important to note that the selection panel will include, as I understand it, one member of provincial Parliament from each of the parties in the Legislature and the panel will be chaired by the Speaker of the Legislature, who will be a non-voting member.

Also, it's important to note that the length of the appointment for this position will be five years, with an option to reappoint, which I understand is similar to what occurs with other positions that we have, like the Ontario Ombudsman. It's very similar to that kind of set-up, which I believe also will help provide the people of Ontario with a sense that this is a position that's moving forward not just with the best of intentions but with the best of that architecture and engineering that I talked about a second ago: making sure that we get this right. That's what I know our government is committed to doing.

The leader of the third party did mention this, and I think it's important as well: Should the legislation pass, we look forward to the fact that ministries and government agencies will be required to provide the fiscal and economic information that's required for the Financial Accountability Officer to be able to do his or her job. Of course, there are some notable exceptions, some appropriate exceptions for that: personal information, personal health information. But it's important to note, as the leader of the third party did say in her remarks, that this

is a position that will be provided and afforded with every opportunity to do the kind of job that the people of my riding of Vaughan and the people of Ontario expect and certainly deserve.

I do want to spend just a second going into slightly more detail with respect to the actual mandate that this bill provides for this new position. I said earlier that it's an independent officer of the Legislature providing advice to all MPPs, but I want to make sure it's clearly understood that what we envision is a position that will provide independent analysis to the assembly about the state, for example, of the province's finances—finances that are, according to the report provided to public accounts by Minister Sousa yesterday, moving forward in an exceptionally strong and responsible way. The independent analysis that this officer will be able to provide will include information about the budget and trends in both the provincial and national economies.

It's also important to note that the bill provides for a mandate for this officer to be able to respond to requests from any member of the Legislature, any member of the assembly or any committee of the assembly, and also to undertake research into the province's finances and trends, as I said a second ago, in both the provincial and national economies; undertake research into the estimates and supplementary estimates that are submitted to this Legislature; undertake research into the financial costs or benefits to the province of any public bill that is before the assembly; and also undertake to estimate—and I think this is extremely important—an opportunity up until this point not provided to members of this Legislature in such a clear way. This bill provides a mandate for a Financial Accountability Officer who will be able "to undertake to estimate the financial costs or benefits to the province of any proposal"—any proposal, Mr. Speaker—"that relates to a matter over which the Legislature has jurisdiction, including any proposal made by the government," whichever government may be in power—again, a non-partisan, independent officer of the Legislature—"or by any member of the assembly."

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I think it's extremely important to note that by putting this particular legislation forward—and that's why it was a tiny bit disheartening for me to hear the opening remarks by the member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke. I know that member has been here a lot longer than I've been here, and I do have a great deal of respect for the experience that all members bring to this floor. But I think on a matter like this, on something like the creation of a Financial Accountability Officer, I would really implore every member of the Legislature coming forward to discuss this over the next number of hours and days to take a step back from that partisan hat that we all like to don from time to time, and instead take a look at the broader view and take a look at making sure—if there is something specific and substantive in this legislation you're not comfortable with, discuss it. Discuss it productively; discuss it constructively. But frankly, Speaker, to get up in the House on something that's so important

to the people of all of our communities—the notion of financial accountability and transparency—and to provide not much more than quite a bit of fanciful bluster, I think, is something that's a bit unfortunate.

I hope, as the debate proceeds, we'll hear an awful lot more from members of all three parties about why this is the right way to move forward, and hopefully members will support it.

By putting this particular bill forward, it's also important to underscore that Ontario is leading the way as the first provincial government in Canada to propose the establishment of such an office. As I've said earlier, our government believes that the creation of a Financial Accountability Officer would enhance the information and resources available to all members of this Legislature and, indeed, to all Ontarians.

As someone who has been in this Legislature serving the community of Vaughan for just about 12 months now, I think it's very important to note that the information that will be provided and the resources that will be provided for by the creation of this officer will help all of us here in this House to make better decisions, to make more informed decisions, about the fiscal impacts specifically of proposals that are put forth here on behalf of the people of all of our communities. I think that will result in better decision-making, which I know is something that, again, Ontarians have a right to expect out of their Legislature. I think it will help all of us not just chart and plan a course but actually succeed in achieving along the way, along that particular course, a very strong and prosperous economy while making sure that we continue to protect the high-quality public services that the people of Ontario expect and deserve.

That's why, Speaker, I think it's really important to say once again, as we continue to have this debate at second reading, as this particular legislation continues to work its way through this legislative process—for all members on all sides of the House to take a look back to the process that culminated in the 2013 budget and, frankly, to perhaps take a tiny bit of a page from the work that was done around a certain party, the third party in this Legislature, playing a more collaborative and constructive role than we saw from the official opposition; to put aside what took place in the spring, to put aside a lot of the partisan, adversarial, confrontational stuff that takes place in this House. I know that behaviour has its place, and I think we all enjoy the cut and thrust of debate and discussion in this House, and I'm just as guilty as the next person of being interested in pursuing partisan goals; there's no doubt about that.

But on something like this, whether you represent Vaughan, Scarborough–Agincourt, Richmond Hill, Oakville, Scarborough–Guildwood, Ottawa South or any other riding from across the province of Ontario, I don't think there's any doubt that in talking to our residents, the people that we have been sent by to work here in this place together—I don't believe there's any doubt that the people of Ontario want to see us move forward in that evolutionary process.

This is a learning process. This is all about making sure that we get the job done correctly for the people of Ontario. We deal today with more technological creativity and advancements than ever before. This is why it's important for us to get the job done correctly on this bill, to have the kind of discussion, the thorough discussion and debate that we need here in this chamber.

I call on all members from all parties to work together, to work with us, to have the kind of debate that we need, to have the kind of discussion we need, but then to get this bill passed to move forward with the creation of a Financial Accountability Officer. I know the people of my riding of Vaughan and the people right across Ontario will greatly appreciate us getting the job done on this bill, and that's why I'm pleased to support it, Speaker. I thank you very much for the time today.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Further debate?

Mr. John O'Toole: I do want to put some context around this Bill 95, the bill that we're discussing today. I did listen carefully to the remarks by the minister originally, but I think we should also keep in mind where this actual office came from. It didn't come from Mr. Del Duca or the Liberal government. It actually came from the NDP, as part of the coalition and assurance that the NDP would get some promissory note from the budget process to buy their support, and they did buy the support through two things: the accountability office as well as the 15% reduction in auto insurance which, by the way, the viewers should be very, very wary of. When they talked about it in the last week or two in the media, it's going to be implemented over a number of years. How about never? That's another broken promise, and that's the context that—I think the leader of the NDP used the words, "They can't be trusted." That's a very true thing here.

I do want to put some context around this in a broader sense. In my response to the minister on the introduction of the bill on Monday, September 9, I related three things where there's accountability or broken promises. The first one—let's keep it in mind now—is the scandalous spending of political promises during the election in 2011, where they cancelled the two gas plants. That, to the moment, is \$585 million. We're looking forward to the next auditor's report on Oakville, and I'm putting on the record now, through you, Speaker, that the cost is going to be in excess of \$1 billion. That's \$1 billion taken out of health care, taken out of education, taken out of the civility of this province. They're living on borrowed time.

The second one is to keep in mind an ongoing inquiry on the scandalous Chris Mazza, on the Ornge helicopters. These were people making millions of dollars a year. The Ornge helicopter business is still in committee, and the expenses there are another scandalous waste of taxpayers' money.

The third thing that people should remember in Ontario, in the context of trust, is eHealth. They promised eHealth, and they've spent billions of dollars on eHealth, and it's still not working.

So they can't be trusted. In fact, they're completely incompetent, completely incompetent. I would suggest—
Interjection.

Mr. John O'Toole: Mr. McMeekin is talking about reading the auditor's report. I'm going to start with the next auditor's report.

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Okay. The minister is actually talking louder than the speaker, which is unacceptable. And the member from Durham is quite aware that he doesn't refer to the person by their name; it's their riding. I would appreciate it if you would follow the guidelines. Thank you.

Continue.

Mr. John O'Toole: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Now, the auditor did report in the pre-election—the viewers should know this. This is the pre-election, 2011 report by the Auditor General, and the Auditor General said in the pre-election how much trouble they were in. He said that they were actually in a structural deficit. That means their growth in expenditures is faster than the growth in revenues. He went on to say the change that had to be made is much like what Tim Hudak has been talking about on our side: a public sector wage freeze. Here's what it said: Health care spending, up until that point of 2011, was about 7% growth per year. He recommended it go to 3.6%. Education was 4% to 5% and should go to 3%. Post-secondary is 8% and should go to 2%. These are costs that the Auditor General said. They went on to promise many things, none of which they delivered—none of which they've delivered. Another one—there's the auditor's report on the cancellation of the gas plant in Mississauga, and we're waiting for the second plant on Oakville to be reported.

There was a report issued prior to that, in 2012, and this was the Drummond report, and this Drummond report is an important reference point. There were 362 recommendations that the McGuinty, now the Wynne, government—and there's no change; they're the same policies—had to do to balance the budget, because, again, we have a structural deficit. How bad is it? We're spending \$32 million a day more than we're taking in as revenue. Each child, each page here, every person in Ontario, man, woman and child, owes \$19,000 of the debt. The debt has grown to almost \$3 billion, and that debt is being serviced by—the third-highest expenditure in the budget is interest on our debt. It's almost \$11 billion a year to service the debt. That's not paying it off; that's to service the debt.

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That's in the context of the budget today, and the interest on debt is very low. The amount of interest is low. Interest is low because that's how they're stimulating the economy through monetary policy. Here's the deal, though: The interest is going to go up. So if it's \$10 billion today, and interest goes up 1%, it will be \$14 billion a year to service the debt. It's scandalous.

There was a report issued right after Mr. Dwight Duncan—he resigned after his budget. This is Ontario

budget 2012: A missed opportunity. They went on to say that he failed. This is a report that's worth seeing. It was issued in May/June 2012. It went on to say a couple of very important things. It says, "Had Duncan actually seized the opportunity to balance Ontario's books, he could have done so in just two years—the same time horizon as the federal Liberals in the 1990s." He went on to suggest several recommendations, many of which are echoed almost daily by Tim Hudak.

I look forward to our new critic of finance, Vic Fedeli—or, pardon me, our member for Nipissing. He will have, I'm sure, a few remarks on this as well. But I think the context here was started by the NDP: It's a matter of trust.

What else has happened here? If you look at what they've done that many people know—I get a lot of calls on this, and I'm going to stop here shortly. I get many calls on this: "How come gasoline is such a high price?" Let's just take that one commodity that is a nondiscretionary consumption. You basically have to have gas to drive your car. You could say, "Stop using your car," but they want to put \$50 billion into transit—which is a good thing. They haven't got the money, but where are they going to get it? It's going to be taxes or user fees or something. But here's the deal: When they changed the HST—this is just one example. HST was made up of harmonizing the GST, which was the goods and service tax of 5%, and the provincial sales tax, which was 8%. So you harmonized them; it was 13%—8% of which was the provincial portion. When you apply that to gasoline, that's eight cents more per litre, and gas is about \$1, \$1.30 or \$1.50. So that's 12 cents per litre of gas, every one of them, the money going to Kathleen Wynne and Charles Sousa.

On your energy bill: It was announced on September 1 that we have the highest energy costs in North America. One of the causes of that is Bill 150, the Green Energy Act. It's called the global adjustment. The global adjustment on your electricity bill—listen up, now. Close your eyes, open your ears. It's eight cents a litre for the global adjustment. That's not the electricity you use; that's to pay for or subsidize wind and solar.

They're paying about 50 cents per kilowatt hour for solar and they're selling it for five cents. So how are they subsidizing that difference between 50 cents and five cents? It's called a global adjustment—which is shutting businesses down in my riding. Bowmanville Foundry is one example, where their global adjustment is a larger cost to them than the cost of the electrons they're actually using.

This government has messed up so many files, not just Ornge helicopters, not just the gas plant issue. The entire energy file is completely messed up. I say to you that they bought peace at the very expensive price of the very standard of living that Ontario has today.

I'm going to stop there because it's not my privilege to take all the time, although I have more to say. I would only say this in conclusion: When people in Ontario are thinking about it, the real job of government is to say no

at the right time for the right reasons. Any person—and I think we're all civilized people here—would love to say yes to every ask. But our governments today around the world have to make important, difficult decisions. I don't believe they have the courage to do it because, first of all, you can't trust them. When you lose trust, you lose the right to lead, and in a democracy, that's when you have an election, to solve that problem. I think this example here was actually Bill 95, on the Financial Accountability Office. The idea was put forward by the NDP; good for them. They sold out to the Liberals, because they're on the same team. They'd spend you out of house and home.

I have more to say, but I'll leave it to my peers to say it.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Further debate?

Ms. Catherine Fife: It is indeed a pleasure for me to stand up in support of the Financial Accountability Office. Of course, it's not surprising that we're hearing such frustration from the PCs. It must have been very frustrating for them to go door to door during the by-elections during the summer and basically have nothing to show for two years of sitting in this House.

The "selling out" line is an old line. It's an old line, because we didn't sell out. We stayed focused on the real priorities of the people of this province. We brought forward ideas on home care and on youth employment, and all of the aggression and frustration that the PCs are expressing motivated us to bring forward this idea of the Financial Accountability Office.

If you've read the legislation—I mean, you said no to the budget before you read the budget, but if you read this piece of legislation, you would see that it's progressive and that it would address many of the concerns that you have. But, instead of actually putting the people first, putting the interests of the people of this province first, you have put your own interests first and fought for an election that nobody wants right now, unless, of course, we're to believe that the Liberals are thinking, "Oh, maybe it's time to have an election." All this election talk is not good for the people of this province. We need to stay focused on jobs. We need to stay focused on the economy.

The Financial Accountability Office brings back confidence to the people of this province, because we have a trust issue. Every one of us has a trust issue. All of us may do really good work at our constituency offices, but what we do here by putting progressive legislation forward is our key job as legislators, and we are proud. I mean, New Democrats obviously are proud of the work that we were able to accomplish.

That is, in many respects, the potential of a minority government. If we brought forward the idea of a Financial Accountability Office in a majority government—no one was listening. That's very clear from the last 10 years. That's very clear from the track record of the Liberal government over the last 10 years. I don't need to rehash all of the scandals, because they're so prevalent. They are on the minds of every Ontarian.

The PCs will say to the people of this province that it's too late to build trust. Well, that's not how we feel as New Democrats. We actually feel that it's never too late to rebuild trust. We feel that it's never too late to right a wrong, and that's what the Financial Accountability Office has the potential of doing. It really is surprising for me to hear that the PC Party is actually going to vote against enhancing their rights to access information.

Hon. Ted McMeekin: It's amazing, isn't it?

Ms. Catherine Fife: It's incredible. You can have access to information. You have seen how hard it is to get information from the Liberal government, and yet, the Financial Accountability Office would give you greater power—not just power for yourselves, but power for the people that you serve, so that you have the information to influence and to impact public policy and legislation.

Of late, much has been made about MPPs' right to documentation of the business of the government. It has been a long, hard fight. We hear it often from the PCs. The work being done over the last year at the Standing Committee on Justice Policy, for instance, and at the Standing Committee on Estimates to fully understand the costs of the gas plants in Mississauga and Oakville is important and necessary, but has also served as a study on the rights of this Legislature.

I just want to share a story with you. I had the opportunity to sit at estimates yesterday and ask the finance minister some specific questions on policy, on legislation, on their ideas around energy and on infrastructure, for instance. At one point, the Minister of Finance cautioned the committee members, both the PCs and the NDP, and said, "You have to be careful about the questions that you're asking, because you've never had this information before."

It was, in many respects, a very patronizing comment, but then he went on to say that this is a shared responsibility; our economy and the state of our finances of the province are a shared responsibility. It's only a shared responsibility when you have the information in front of you. Then, it is truly a shared responsibility, and all of us bear the brunt of that responsibility in this House. And all of us have had difficulty accessing key information on gas plants, on energy, on infrastructure, for instance. Look how long it took to get the real story about the Ornge air ambulance scandal. Meanwhile, people's lives were impacted in a very negative way.

1010

The reason I bring up the responsibility of government is to, of course, ensure that Ontarians have transparency and have true accountability and that the government and all future governments—that's a real key piece. I was asked this question on Monday. This idea: "It's going to impact you, too." Yes. Yes, it is. And that is good. It will hold all future governments accountable.

There are so many examples of when, actually, a Financial Accountability Office could have been used in the last 10 years, in the last 20 years. For instance, if the selling of the 407 highway, the toll highway, had a full

financial analysis, do you think that that deal would have gone through? Because that was a bad deal for the people of this province. It's a bad deal today. Think of the profits that we have lost as a province that we could have invested in education, that we could have invested in health care—billions of dollars.

You want to talk about scandals. The Financial Accountability Office brings to this Legislature an independent level of accountability, because the Liberals have brought in other ideas about financial accountability, and we actually heard the Premier last week say, "Just because you say something over and over doesn't make it true." Yes, we know that. We know that based on their entire track record, right?

When you talk to people in the community, in our own constituencies, all of us recognize—if you're really listening to the people of this province—that there is a serious trust issue. People want to trust the government. They want to see progressive ideas happen in this Legislature that they can actually support.

This idea of a coalition—it's like people have not recognized that this is a minority government. In a minority government, the rules have changed. You just can't play the same old games. You have to come to the table with ideas, which we have done. Actually, you know what? When you can influence a budget the way that we have in the last two budgets—we've showed up to work in this Legislature, we have put people first and we have gotten real results.

I understand the frustration from the official opposition that they haven't been able to get results—because getting an election is not a result. It is not something that people value. People out there right now just want us to build confidence in our economy. They want to get back to work. They want their students, actually, not to pay exorbitant post-secondary fees. They want their children to access a public education system that is safe, that is healthy and that is inclusive. There is so much work before us as legislators.

Today, I'm listening to some of the sabre-rattling from the Liberals: "Oh, the opposition. They don't want to work with us." You know what? Quite honestly, if the NDP comes to work, the work gets done. The PCs have basically written themselves off. They have rendered themselves irrelevant in the development of policy and legislation in this province. They don't want to play. But we are here and we have ideas, and the ideas that we have come from the people of this province, and that makes for a stronger Legislature. That makes for a stronger Queen's Park. That's what people expect from the people that they elected: to work on their behalf.

A lot has been said about the cost, for instance, of the FAO. It is actually the lowest official office cost in the Legislature. So talk about value for money. It's forward-thinking. For instance, a good comparable would be investing in physiotherapy for seniors so that they don't fall, so that they don't end up in the ER, so they don't end up in a long-term-care facility. It's a preventive, early intervention measure that we can take to ensure that the money that comes into this place is spent responsibly.

Earlier, the House leader went on to say that this is a mirror of the Auditor General. It is not. The Auditor General looks at things after they've already happened, and it exposes the lies and exposes the incompetence. The Financial Accountability Office, actually, is forward-thinking—so we would have had an opportunity to look at the contracts on the Mississauga and Oakville gas plants. We would have realized that cancelling those plants had a huge cost, and it would have actually projected even the future costs—because we don't even talk about that anymore, about the transmission from Napanee, for instance. That is a scandal. It's a scandal that was preventable, and all of us actually knew that at the time. Yet the Liberals went ahead, as we've heard in the gas plant justice committee. They went ahead and they cancelled it anyway without regard for the true cost to the people of this province.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): It being 10:15, this House stands recessed until 10:30 this morning.

The House recessed from 1015 to 1030.

ANNIVERSARY OF 9/11

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The Premier on a point of order.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Mr. Speaker, before we begin, I'd like to acknowledge that today is the 12th anniversary of the September 11 attacks on the United States and suggest that we remember today those who lost their lives in this tragic event and the bravery of the first responders who put their own lives at risk to help others. I'd like to ask that the House observe a moment of silence in recognition of this anniversary.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The Premier is seeking unanimous consent to stand for a moment's remembrance of the anniversary of 9/11. Agreed? Agreed.

Please, all rise.

The House observed a moment's silence.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Mike Colle: I have the family of the page from Eglinton–Lawrence, William Howard-Waddingham. His family is here: his mother, Kelly Waddingham; Martha Howard; and Brigid Waddingham. I'd like to welcome to the Legislature today the parents and family of William Howard-Waddingham. Welcome.

Mr. Harinder S. Takhar: Mr. Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to introduce some very distinguished guests from India today. I want to introduce Sukhdev Singh Dhindsa. Mr. Dhindsa is currently a member of the Rajya Sabha, which is like a Senate, in India. He's a former member of Parliament of India and a former Union Minister of Sports and Chemicals and Fertilizers. He is also the general secretary of the Shiromani Akali Dal. Welcome.

He also has some other guests joining him today: Harbans Singh Jandali is the general secretary of the Ontario Khalsa Darbar; Beant Singh Dhaliwal, president of the Shiromani Akali Dal, Canada; Dalbir Singh Sidhu is a great friend and organizer and a community worker; Inderjit Bal, a very good friend of mine; Inderjit Singh Dhugga; Karan Singh Ghumaan; Bikramjit Singh Goraya; Pavittar Singh Gill; Harsharan Singh Ghumaan; Jasbir Singh Lalli; and Satpal Johal is a TV and radio host.

I really want to extend a very warm welcome to them.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: It is my pleasure to introduce an international delegation that many members are going to be meeting with today. They are from Taiwan. If I may introduce them, they're over here. They're students from the National Tsing Hua University in Taiwan. They are with their teacher Wen-Hsin I: Meng-yun Tsai, I-Ling Huang, En-Ling Chang, Pei-Chi Wu, Hsueh-Han Lien and Yeu-Wei Harn. They are with the Taipei Economic and Cultural Office, with Justin Lee and Henri Chuang, who are well known to many members here. Later today, the director general, Winston Chen, will be joining us.

We would like to welcome you warmly to our assembly.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: I'm very pleased and privileged to introduce a couple of health care trailblazers from the community that I'm from, Hamilton; first and foremost, Dr. Peter B. Dent, who was instrumental as a founder in Hamilton of the McMaster Children's Hospital and the Hamilton Ronald McDonald House. Peter is here on the government benches with his daughter Ashley.

Welcome. We're very proud to have you here.

We also have with us a trailblazer from a different side of the health care field—a community health centre: Denise Brooks, the executive director of the Hamilton Urban Core Community Health Centre. A number of the people from that organization are here as well, and I'd like to welcome you here to the Legislature as well.

Mr. Percy Hatfield: I'd like to introduce a friend of mine from the town of Tecumseh: Mario Spagnuolo, who is here. Mario is one of the most dedicated educators in the province. He's up here for a conference this afternoon. He came a little early to watch democracy in action so he can report back to his children in the school system how we conduct ourselves during question period. So I hope we do a good job for him today.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I am delighted to welcome people from the Canadian Pulmonary Fibrosis Foundation. Joining us today are President Robert Davidson, Michael Jarvis, Henry Lowi, Larkell Bradley, Ron Lillie, Jean Lillie, Connie Detzler, Hugh Detzler, Laurie Fowler and Roger Chandler. I know they'll be meeting with many members today. We're delighted to have you in the House.

Hon. Michael Chan: I would like to also welcome my constituent Mr. Robert Davidson who's here today. He's also president of the Canadian Pulmonary Fibrosis Foundation. The foundation will be hosting a reception this afternoon in the legislative dining room from 5:30 p.m. to 7:30 p.m.

Hon. Linda Jeffrey: I'd like to welcome the hard-working and tireless people from the co-operative housing federation, who are here to speak in support of Bill 14 at public hearings later today. I'd like to welcome Dale Reagan, Harvey Cooper, Simone Swail, Judy Shaw and Keith Moyer. Welcome.

Hon. John Gerretsen: Speaker, would you help me welcome my sister, Sister Marijke Gerretsen, who has been teaching in Japan for the last 40 years. She's here in the public gallery, together with Sister Yoko Ikeda. They are here with a group of 19 students from the Sakura no Seibo Junior College in Fukushima, Japan. They've been here in Ontario for the last two weeks to learn about our way of life and on a cultural exchange as well.

M^{me} France Gélinas: Well, my leader introduced the executive director of Hamilton Urban Core Community Health Centre, but Mrs. Brooks never travels alone. She has a few friends with her, and it would be my pleasure to introduce them.

I'll start with Margie and Dan Goold; Lynn Simmons is here; Floydene Charles-Fridal; Maciej Kowalski; Tibor Lukacs; Vicas Sood; Attila Csikos; Rosella Russo; Rhonda Castello; Alma Harris; Ursula Samuels; Sybyl Don-Martin; Wendell Fields; Tim Button; Jason Whalen; Tom Kaler; Catherine Hines; Sherry Proper; Francia Cenpeno; Sofia Ramirez; Paul Henry and Sean Gibson. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I am delighted to welcome Dr. Peter Dent here. Peter is a legend. He's the founder of McMaster Children's Hospital and the Hamilton Ronald McDonald House. We are delighted he's joined us today.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I do want to remind all members that I make a noble attempt to try to have all of you introduce your guests here because that's very important, and it's the people's place. I'm going to remind you to keep your comments to the introduction and avoid as much of the preambles as possible, which allows me to stay within the agreed-upon time that we've worked out. But I will try to be as sensitive as possible, because there are some that are time-sensitive; they either have to leave or go. I'm trying to work with everybody in this. If everyone can co-operate back, I don't think we'll have any complications with this—because it is an important thing for us to do, which is to introduce all of our guests who come to us in the people's place.

I thank you for your co-operation and thank you for your patience in making my job a little easier to try to get these introductions done for everyone.

1040

ORAL QUESTIONS

PUBLIC TRANSIT

Mr. Tim Hudak: My question is to the Premier. Momentarily, the member for Etobicoke-Lakeshore, Doug Holyday, will be tabling a motion calling on the

government to make good on its promise to the people of Scarborough in the recent by-election to build a subway line, as requested by city council. I want to congratulate the member for Etobicoke-Lakeshore for bringing this to the floor so quickly.

My question to you, Premier, is, will you support the motion? Will you actually keep your promise to the people of Scarborough?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I have to say it is refreshing to hear the Leader of the Opposition coming forward and talking about transit. I think that's great. I think that's just wonderful.

As the Leader of the Opposition knows, since we came into office, we've been investing in transit. There are projects happening all over the province. In fact, there is building going on in Ottawa, in Kitchener-Waterloo. There's building going on within the GTHA. There is transit money being used across the province as a result of the gas tax investments that we have made. There is a lot of work that is happening right now. I think our commitment to building transit is evidenced by the work that is happening.

We have been working with the city of Toronto on this file. We've listened to the members from Scarborough. We've listened to the people of Scarborough. We're committed to building a subway in Scarborough. We've committed \$1.4 billion and another \$320 million for the station. We will build that subway.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Mr. Tim Hudak: Well, back to the Premier: I listened carefully to the Premier's response. I simply asked if you were keeping your promise. I didn't hear either a yes or a no.

I'll tell you why I'm concerned. Premier, it was in March 2012 that we brought forward a motion in the House, standing in my name as Leader of the Opposition, to build subways in Scarborough. That was our motion, and we brought it to the floor over a year ago. I'm proud of that.

Mrs. Christine Elliott: We've been consistent.

Mr. Tim Hudak: We've been consistent. You, Premier, and your transportation minister voted against it.

You referenced yesterday your canoe trip over the summer. You probably saw a lot of carp flipping and flopping in the river that you were in. Are we seeing the same thing here today? You're not going to flip-flop? Are you flip-flopping? Honest to goodness, it's hard to tell where you stand on the issue. Just yes or no, Premier: Are you going to keep your promise, or are you going to flip-flop yet again?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Order.

Premier.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: As I said, we have been committed to building transit, and we will continue to build transit. We're committed to building the subway in Scarborough.

The piece that the Leader of the Opposition is missing in this is that we have to work with partners. We have to

work with the municipalities. The fact is that the Leader of the Opposition is coming into this discussion talking about one project to which we are committed. In answer to your question, we've said—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Excuse me. We're back to that little habit that we were out of during the summer break, which is that I'm hearing people from that side heckling while the question is being put, and while the answer is being put, I'm hearing heckling from this side.

I'd like all of us just to simply stop the heckling.

Mr. John Yakabuski: We're actually not getting answers.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Renfrew doesn't help his case at all for today.

Answer, please?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: The Leader of the Opposition is coming in on one project in one region, as opposed to understanding that building transit is—

Hon. Deborah Matthews: It's a system.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: It's a systematic approach that has to be taken, and we have to work with partners. But we're committed to building transit in Scarborough, and we're committed to building the subway in Scarborough.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary.

Mr. Tim Hudak: I don't know, Speaker; I've never seen this kind of quality of verbal gymnastics in a simple yes-or-no question. Are you going to keep your promise or not?

The Premier said, "Well, you have to work with partners." I remind you, Premier, that just a couple of weeks ago your Minister of Transportation, Mr. Murray, went out there and, all of a sudden, launched his own brand new plan that nobody had heard of, that council did not support, that the TTC did not support, that Scarborough residents didn't support and that Metrolinx didn't support. Nobody supports that plan.

The promise in the by-election was absolutely clear: a line going from Kennedy up to Sheppard through Scarborough City Centre. Your minister invents a new project with less money, fewer stops and lower quality.

Listen, the people of Scarborough have run into brick walls for far too long. We're going to put you up against that same brick wall with Doug Holyday's motion. Are you going to keep your promise, or are you going to flip-flop right out of the gate?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I think that the Leader of the Opposition might want to have a conversation with the new member from Etobicoke-Lakeshore and talk about exactly what has gone on at city council over the last couple of years, talk about how contentious this issue has been, and understand from the member from Etobicoke-Lakeshore where the money is coming from, where the \$1.4 billion and the extra \$320 million is coming from, for the project. That would be from this government, from the provincial level; not from the city and not

from the federal government. I think if the Leader of the Opposition wants to talk to the member for Etobicoke-Lakeshore and just understand the context that has been in place for the last three years, as we've gone back and forth with the city of Toronto, that might be very helpful for him, because he's coming in late in the game on one project.

We're committed to building the subway in Scarborough, and we're committed to working with our municipal partners.

PUBLIC TRANSIT

Mr. Douglas C. Holyday: Firstly, Mr. Speaker, I would like to apologize for calling you "Madam Speaker" yesterday. That really stems from a long-time habit I've had at some other establishment.

My question today, though, is for the Premier. A few months ago, your Minister of Transportation said that it would be difficult for Metrolinx to proceed if Toronto city council and the TTC are not supportive of the transit options that have received municipal approval. Now your government has ignored the city of Toronto by offering a shortened version of the Scarborough subway. Madam Premier, why have you decided to move forward without the city of Toronto and the TTC?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Order.

I'll be waiting for the last person to try to get the word in because it's quiet.

Minister?

Hon. Glen R. Murray: Mr. Speaker, I also predicted a few weeks ago, or a month ago, that the member from Etobicoke-Lakeshore would be here representing the mayor's views, and he's doing exactly what we said and he's doing exactly what Conservative politicians in this House, conservative politicians at city hall and Conservative politicians in Ottawa do with subways in Toronto. They pass motions; they never write cheques. Here we have classic civic-provincial-federal conservatism on subways—yet another motion. I would suggest to my friend from Etobicoke-Lakeshore and his friend Mayor Ford, who have such great relationships with Mr. Flaherty, that maybe they can together get Mr. Flaherty to write a cheque for a subway in Toronto.

We are not, Mr. Speaker, going to build subways in Scarborough on motions and rhetoric and press releases. We need money. The only people putting money into subways, Mr. Speaker, are the Liberals.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Douglas C. Holyday: It's going to be very difficult to build a subway in Toronto or anywhere else without the government of Ontario's support. The trouble here is that the government of Ontario has been all over the lot on both sides of this question—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Order. Carry on.

Mr. Douglas C. Holyday: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

You cannot be on all sides of this equation. This is not a merry-go-round; you can't get off whenever you want. I just want to know: Are you really onside this time? Are you really going to follow your plan, or are you not?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please.

Minister.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: Mr. Speaker, we have come to understand that Conservatives love to fill in subways. They bizarrely champion them, but they never like to pay for them. The other thing we know about Conservatives is, they don't like to read. They don't read budgets and they don't read plans, because if they had actually read a plan, the Leader of the Opposition would know he was dead wrong again. The line on that map has not changed in one single plan. We're following the same route that we ever had. The only change, Mr. Speaker—we have never changed our position once. The flip-flopping carps are over there.

What is the price tag for that whipped-up, out-of-the-blue thing that the member for Etobicoke Centre—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Answer?

1050

Hon. Glen R. Murray: It's \$3 billion, Mr. Speaker—\$3 billion. The fiscal prudence for Conservatives is when you can build a line—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I'd like to gently remind all members: When I stand, you sit. I'll say it again so that the minister is looking at me when I say it.

This is a gentle reminder for everyone: When I stand, you sit.

Final supplementary.

Mr. Douglas C. Holyday: Premier, you wanted LRTs. Then you changed your mind. You asked council for support, and then you acted on your own. Last year, you voted against a motion supporting the Sheppard subway extension. Then you flip-flopped on LRTs. Then you flip-flopped on the Scarborough subway.

People in Scarborough don't want you to break another promise you made during the election, so we're back to trust. After the gas plant scandal, we know Liberals will do anything it takes to win votes—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Order.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I am asking for quiet, and it should be obvious that no one else would add their two cents' worth, like the member from Durham, while I'm speaking.

The member from Oxford, I hope we don't have to go to the medic to take care of your hand, or else repair that desk.

You have a short wrap-up for your question.

Mr. Douglas C. Holyday: In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, the people of Ontario do not trust this government. Premier, with your chronic flip-flopping, the transit

voters of the city of Toronto can never trust you. You've got to make a solid decision and you've got to stick to it.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Minister.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: I have to apologize to the member for Etobicoke-Lakeshore. I had suggested he had moved to the centre. I was clearly wrong.

Mr. Speaker, \$16.4 billion in 15 rapid transit projects: a consistent plan, our Premier, we have not moved off of one inch.

There are more Conservative MPs and city councilors, and now one MPP, and together, they can't come up with 4% of the solution. The member opposite and I both were mayors. Both of us know we start conversations with one third. Why doesn't the member opposite ask the federal government why in Kitchener and Ottawa, the federal government pays one third of transit costs, but in the 416, in his area, 4%?

The gap between us and the transit system the people of Toronto deserve is one word: It's "Conservative." When you vote Conservative, you get—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. New question.

GOVERNMENT'S AGENDA

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is to the Premier. The people of Ontario have sent us a pretty clear message: Focus on delivering results that create jobs, improve their health care, make life more affordable and make government more accountable. Does the Premier have a problem with any of this?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: No, absolutely not, Mr. Speaker. In fact, that's exactly what we're doing. Our investments in people and in business and in infrastructure are designed to do precisely what the leader of the third party is talking about: to grow the economy, to create jobs and to make sure that we help people in their day-to-day challenges. That's the kind of initiative that is included in our budget. That's the work that we have been doing over the last eight months and before, and that's the work that we will continue to do, I hope, with the co-operation of people in this House.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: People look to the government for leadership, and what they're seeing these days are some pretty cynical games, whether it's playing political games to make their budget numbers look good or using a plan to protect youth from cancer risk as a political football. People actually expect better from their government.

Will the Premier stop playing these same old political games and start focusing on results that people need?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Again, I'm not sure what the leader of the third party is referencing, but if she is talking about the announcement that the Minister of Finance made yesterday about our overachievement on

our budget and on our deficit, and if she is talking about the way we are managing the finances that the—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): You may be volunteering yourself.

Premier?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: The fact that the Auditor General has signed off on the numbers that were released yesterday, I think, should give the leader of the third party and, certainly, the people of Ontario some confidence when we say that the 2012-13 deficit is now down to \$9.2 billion, that we're \$5.6 billion lower than was projected in the 2012 budget—a further reduction of \$600 million since the 2013 budget—and that, for the first time in a decade, total spending fell from the previous year. Spending is down, as we said it would be. We are constraining spending, and we are overachieving on our targets. That's good news—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

Stop the clock. I'm going to mention the member from Renfrew and the member from Peterborough. I don't want to have to come back to you.

Final supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: This week, we started debating the Financial Accountability Office. I'm sure that office will have some things to say about Liberal numbers, but as we go forward, we're going to keep working to ensure that home care wait-lists are actually going to go down in this province, that auto insurance rates are going to go down and that youth unemployment is going to go down.

People remember this government's track record. They know that Liberals only moved to protect youth from tanning beds because it would, according to a Liberal staffer, "make a fabulous headline" to detract from gas plants. Now, they know that this government is only moving on youth jobs, home care and accountability because New Democrats demanded it. They want to see results, but they've lost trust in this government.

Is the Premier ready to focus on results for the people who elected us, or are we going to see more of the silly political games that the Liberals like to play so much?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Well, first of all, I just want to say that, on this side of the House, we have a lot of confidence in the Auditor General. When the Auditor General signs off on numbers, we really support that. That's why that scrutiny is so important.

In terms of the deep cynicism around the actions of the government, I just want to say that our commitment to improving kids' lives, all of the changes that we've made in education, the supports that we've put in place for communities, the fact that we are continuing to implement full-day kindergarten—all of those are evidence of our commitment to the future, to making sure that the investments that we make improve young people's lives into the future. The measures that are included in our budget are an extension of that.

The leader of the third party chose some issues as we went into the budget last year that she knew perfectly

well we wanted to take action on. We've taken action on those, and they will improve people's lives.

MEMBERS' PRIVILEGES

Ms. Andrea Horwath: This next question is for the Premier as well.

A simple step the Premier could take today would be to ensure that the committee looking into wasted millions at the gas plants is able to actually do its job. When the Premier was rejecting calls for a public inquiry that we were calling for earlier on, she insisted that this committee was going to be able to have all of their questions answered, but we all know that hasn't been happening. For two days, the Premier has refused to say in this House whether she will do anything about it.

Is the Premier going to open up the gas plant committee so that Ontarians can get answers about Liberal political interference, or will she keep protecting her Liberal friends?

1100

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Again, I have a lot of respect for the procedures of this Legislative Assembly. I do not control committees. I think it's fairly clear that Chairs of committees take their advice from the Clerk, and then the committee makes those decisions. The fact is, in a minority Parliament, we don't control the committees. The committees are a reflection of the makeup of the House. In fact, the NDP and the Conservatives can work in committee, and they can make those decisions.

I've been clear that my position is that the committee should have the opportunity to ask the questions that it wants to ask. So I turn to the committee and I say I hope that they will work to ask the questions that they want to have answered, that they will provide opportunities for people to come forward, and I will leave that up to them to make those deliberations, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, yesterday the Premier said the justice committee has her blessing to ask the questions it needs. Well, that's very nice, Speaker. That's very nice. But the Premier's blessing does not get Ontarians answers about questions that are being blocked at committee. What will get answers, Speaker, regardless of her refusal to acknowledge it, is the Premier supporting an expanded scope of this committee. Will the Premier support expanding the scope of the justice committee or will she keep protecting well-connected Liberal insiders?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I really believe that the committee needs to be allowed to do its job. From my perspective, every person that the committee has wanted to call from the Liberal Party has come forward, as far as I know. As the committee has asked people to come forward, they have come forward. As the committee has asked for documents, they have received those documents—135,000 of them, Mr. Speaker.

I'll just put the sarcasm aside. When I said that the committee has my blessing, I meant that. I meant that if

the committee wants to ask particular questions, they want to make decisions, it's up to the committee to do its work with advice from the Clerk. But I think that they've had a broad scope, and they should be able to continue to exercise that.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: It's a pretty interesting day today, Speaker. The Premier has said she wants transparency. On April 25, she said, "I said I was committed to being open and transparent ... all the questions that were asked were going to be answered."

On April 16, she said, "From day one when I came into this job ... information that was being asked for needed to be available."

Earlier this week, she said she will "make sure that, as questions are asked, they get answered." She said the same thing again today.

But the Premier needs to know we are asking the questions about Liberal interference with the Speaker. Will the Premier make sure that those questions get answered at committee?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I'm pretty sure that the particular issue that the leader of the third party is referencing got addressed by you earlier this week, Mr. Speaker, so I am not going to weigh into that. What I will say is that the committee has the authority to ask the questions that it chooses to ask, with the advice of the Clerk.

If there is a discussion that needs to happen among the House leaders in terms of changes, as the Premier and the leader of this party, I'm open to that happening. The House leader can meet with the House leaders from the opposition and the third party. They can have that discussion.

I remain committed to being open and transparent on this issue. I have said that as there are questions that come forward, I want those questions to be answered. This is not about protection of anyone. It's about opening up the process, and that's why the boxes of paper, all of the information that has been made available has been made available, Mr. Speaker.

TEACHERS' COLLECTIVE BARGAINING

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: My question is to the Premier. Earlier today, part of your caucus in the public accounts committee supported our motion to finally learn the true cost of the reopened negotiations with the teachers' contracts last year. Today, in the Toronto Sun, it has been estimated that that cost would be as high as \$500 million. But what I am concerned about is the fact that your party is split, and it was very clear in the public accounts committee today that you were split.

So my question is, will you finally be open and transparent with the taxpayers to reveal these true costs? Given the Auditor General's report into the gas plants, one of my major concerns is that your party will obstruct legislative officers as well as members of this assembly

in getting the true costs. Can we get a commitment from you today, very public, that you will not get in the way of getting those answers out to the public, who very desperately want them?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Education.

Hon. Liz Sandals: I'm very pleased to respond to this because, in fact, we have been quite open about what the financial considerations are here. We announced in January 2013 that we had reached savings of \$1.8 billion as a result of labour negotiations, and as of today, we continue to achieve savings of \$1.8 billion. Nothing has changed.

What we clearly are very pleased about is that, as a result of our discussions with our friends in the various teachers' groups and the various education support workers' groups, we have in fact achieved what we wanted to achieve, which was a good start to the school year. I can tell you that any parents and grandparents I have spoken to in the last few weeks are absolutely delighted that we have received a good start to the school year.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: This minister did not provide me with any cost whatsoever. In fact, after six months of asking, doing order paper questions, asking questions in this assembly, not once did she provide me with a detailed breakdown of what this costs.

Mr. Speaker, you'll understand when I get concerned as a mother, with my child in the public education system, when the education minister in this House says that her number one priority is about bargaining—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Minister of the Environment, come to order.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: —not educating students in our classrooms. It's a very big challenge for us on this side to believe this government, because they don't want to tell us what the true costs are.

I also am very concerned because this is the Premier who effectively campaigned to get the support of the teachers' unions by accepting tens of thousands of dollars from them in the last year. She then decided to repeal Bill 115 at the unions' request. She decided to appease the unions by pushing out the former minister.

All I am simply asking on behalf of parents, teachers who want to teach, students and members of this assembly is: Will they do their job, will they provide us with the information and will they table it, effective immediately?

Hon. Liz Sandals: Unlike the party opposite, we actually do believe that teachers want to teach, and we're very appreciative of that.

I must say, in terms of confusing numbers, the member opposite has claimed we have a \$100-million bill, a \$300-million bill, a \$500-million bill. I want to get the accurate number.

What we did is we struck an implementation cost estimate working group, and we have been working with school boards over the course of the summer, working through each item accurately and getting the actual

figures from the school boards. We have one or two items remaining, and when we have those accurate numbers absolutely nailed down, we will in fact release the accurate, actual costs, and I'm quite prepared to do that.

TANNING BED LEGISLATION

M^{me} France Gélinas: Ma question est pour la première ministre. For five years, my NDP colleagues and I have been urging this government to regulate the tanning industry. But for five years, this government has let the bills languish, despite the fact that we knew of the cancer risk.

Speaker, this bill could have passed in 2008, in 2010, in 2012. Right now, it feels like a cynical game is being played on the backs of cancer patients.

If the Premier is not playing politics, then why didn't she pass this bill when she had a majority government?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Health and Long-Term Care.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I am asking all members of this Legislature to work together for the benefit of the people of Ontario. We have an opportunity to pass this bill by the end of September. We need a party to stand with us to get that job done.

The member opposite's commitment to this tanning legislation is impeccable. She clearly supports this legislation that was first introduced by Khalil Ramal in 2008. Since 2008, cancer patients have been waiting for us to take a step that almost every other province has already done. We can get this done by September 30. It's time to put the political gamesmanship aside and get this job done.

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The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

M^{me} France Gélinas: Thanks to the good work of the cancer society and of Kate of the Melanoma Network, right now if anyone in this House was to hold up this bill, they would be on the front page of every media with a set of red horns and long pointy tail. Nobody is going to hold this bill up. We've discovered that the only reason that this government suddenly became interested in the bill was to distract Ontarians from the gas plant scandal.

Instead of actually delivering results for Ontarians, why is the Premier more interested in manufacturing a crisis when in fact everybody agrees that it is time for this bill to move forward?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Minister of Health and Long-Term Care.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: The member opposite was present this morning at a media conference. She heard first-hand from the people who were advocating for speedy passage of this bill. The Canadian Cancer Society, melanoma survivors, the Ontario Medical Association—there is overwhelming consensus that passing this bill is the right thing to do. It has been introduced five—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Minister?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Speaker, this bill or a bill similar to this has been introduced five times. Five times, the hopes of the cancer survivors have been raised and then dashed. We have a plan to get this done by September 30. I don't know why both parties aren't standing with us, together, and saying, "We can get this done." Let's get working together and get this legislation passed by September 30.

TANNING BED LEGISLATION

Mr. Joe Dickson: My question is for the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. Parents and families in my community of Ajax–Pickering want to know if this government is serious in its commitment to protect the health of our sons, our daughters and our children. In March, the minister introduced the legislation that, if passed, would restrict access to tanning bed services for Ontarians under 18.

My question—straightforward: Could the minister tell us when she expects this legislation to move forward?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I'd like to thank the member from Ajax–Pickering for this very important question. As we were saying, this Skin Cancer Prevention Act represents common ground. All three parties agree that this legislation should move forward. There has been broad consensus that this is the right thing to do, but unfortunately this legislation has been blocked. It has not moved forward because the PCs have been extending debate for 55 hours on three other bills, blocking the progress of this legislation. We can no longer allow this legislation to be held up. The longer this legislation is delayed, the worse it is for our young people. So we will be moving a programming motion. I look forward to the support of the parties opposite.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Joe Dickson: Thank you, Minister. It's great news for all Ontarians that we have an opportunity to pass this vital legislation swiftly. It seems to all of us in the House that we agree that restricting young Ontarians' access to tanning services is vital to protecting their health. However, as you have noted, this bill has needlessly been delayed.

Can the minister, through you, Speaker, tell us why it is important to have this done so quickly?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I'm quite aware that there is broad support for this legislation to move forward, and for very good reason. The dangers of exposure to artificial radiation for young people have been very well documented.

Speaker, I've been disappointed that the Leader of the Opposition kind of fluffed it off as not an important issue. I tell you, this is an important issue. It's an important issue for young people; it's an important issue for cancer patients.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Prince Edward–Hastings come to order.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Prince Edward—Hastings is warned.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Renfrew is warned.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Renfrew maybe didn't hear it while he was yelling. I said he is warned.

Finish your answer.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Speaker, at the end of question period, I will be moving unanimous consent for this programming motion—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Stop the clock. Be seated, please. Order, please.

New question.

MINING INDUSTRY

Mr. Norm Miller: I have a question for the Premier on the Ring of Fire. Premier, your government has done a lot of talking about the Ring of Fire. You've touted the project in throne speeches, budgets, debate and in response to questions here in the Legislature. But despite all this talk, we are seeing very little progress made on the Ring. In fact, things have taken a step backward recently, with major players choosing to put their operations on hold, punctuated by the decision by Cliffs Resources to suspend work on their environmental assessment.

Premier, since becoming leader of your party, have you met with Cliffs, Noront or KWG, all key players who will create thousands of jobs for Ontarians by developing the Ring of Fire?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: To the Minister of Northern Development and Mines.

Hon. Michael Gravelle: I appreciate the question from the member. Indeed, the Ring of Fire is a very exciting economic development opportunity for not just northern Ontario but for the whole province of Ontario. We are working very, very closely with all the companies involved in the Ring of Fire, certainly including the companies that the member mentioned.

I think what's extraordinarily important for us is to take the good news that's coming forward; for example, the fact that we are working so closely with First Nations—a set of negotiations on a regional framework basis led by the Matawa First Nations, led by Mr. Rae; and by asking Mr. Frank Iacobucci to take on the provincial negotiating role, which is moving forward in a very positive way.

Just this morning, for example, members may not know that the application for a judicial review has been actually withdrawn by the Matawa—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Answer.

Hon. Michael Gravelle: —showing real confidence, may I say, in the process that's moving forward with Mr. Rae and Mr. Iacobucci. So—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

Hon. Michael Gravelle: —a complex, extraordinarily complex—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. I stand, you sit.

Supplementary?

Mr. Norm Miller: It's hard for the minister to provide a useful answer to a direct question asked of the Premier. So again, to the Premier, even in the face of prominent miners criticizing delays in the approval process and “unresolved agreements with the government of Ontario that are critical to the project's economic viability,” you insist that the Ring of Fire is moving ahead.

Premier, for claiming that your government would make the north a priority, your actions have done little to signal that there's been any real change. While getting the Ring of Fire right is important, there needs to be real action to show that you're committed to creating northern jobs.

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With yesterday's ruling of the land commissioner in mind, why should miners continue investing millions of dollars to stay afloat in the Ring of Fire when there's so little action on the part of your government?

Hon. Michael Gravelle: What's so absolutely crucial is that we do have the support of all three parties in the Legislature to move the project forward. Certainly, the information relating to the withdrawal of the application for judicial review is a very important piece in terms of moving the project forward.

There is no question: We do indeed agree that we all need to get it right, and that certainly includes working on making sure that the First Nations that are closest to the Ring of Fire are absolutely going to benefit from this project. That is certainly one of the goals that we have. It's also one of the very clear goals of the major companies involved in this project. I think that if you're talking to Cliffs Natural Resources, Noront Resources, KWG or Canada Chrome, they're also working very, very closely.

We are extremely encouraged by the decision to withdraw the judicial review.

The issue relating to the Mining and Lands Commissioner is one that we are looking at very closely, obviously, between Cliffs and KWG.

The long and the short is: It's a great project. This is a project—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. New question.

PUBLIC TRANSIT

Mr. Rosario Marchese: My question is to the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure. Yesterday, we learned that the minister's Scarborough transit proposal (1) does not have a detailed cost estimate, (2) would likely cause delays and cost overruns in the Eglinton Crosstown line, and (3) require Toronto council approval and willingness to pay hundreds of millions of dollars in sunk costs and cost overruns.

Why is the minister undermining transit expansion in Scarborough by floating a plan with so many flaws, road-blocks and uncertainties?

Hon. Glen R. Murray: What we learned yesterday has never been the minister's plan. It has actually been a plan, worked on very diligently, between Metrolinx and MTO. It's actually the same plan that we've had for a very long time. If you just click twice on the MTO website, it pops up, and if you go back through time regression, you'll actually see that the same line is there.

We asked the city one question—"Do you want an LRT or a subway?"—because our members now for 20 years have wanted a subway and there were previous city councils that said they did not want a subway. When the council changed its mind in May to agree with my colleagues like Minister Duguid and my many MPP colleagues from Scarborough who had been elected on a subway—they said to me as minister and to the Premier, "Can we do it?" We did it, and we're going to do it with as minimal changes as possible. We're sticking to the same plan. There are no changes. The only flip-flops have been in the NDP, and the only government that has changed its position is the city's.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: What pops up is this: The minister is running roughshod over Metrolinx by pushing a proposal (1) without knowing how much taxpayer money will be wasted by breaking contracts with Bombardier and other suppliers, and (2) without the agreement of Toronto council to cover sunk costs and cost overruns and without confirmation that the plan is technically feasible.

What price will the city of Toronto, the TTC, Metrolinx and, above all, the taxpayers pay for the minister's arrogance and his self-serving scheme?

Hon. Glen R. Murray: I have been accused of drawing some hard edges, but I don't personally attack people like the member opposite just did.

Second, very quickly: I know that the Conservatives and the NDP like to debate subways. They don't like to build them. They propose motions. The member for Trinity-Spadina wants us to get into another debate. We're not debating subways anymore. We're not debating transit; we're building it, and we're building it now.

I'm not interested in politicians who want to move motions. The people of Scarborough are fed up with the politics of this. The people of Scarborough are getting their subway, on budget, on time.

Enough talk; let the member for Etobicoke continue his rants from city hall and move more motions here. We don't need city hall politics here. We certainly don't need the NDP, who have no position—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. New question.

CO-OPERATIVE HOUSING

Ms. Mitzie Jacquelín Hunter: The question is for the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. I have heard from a number of my constituents in Scarborough-Guild-

wood who live in co-operative housing that they have to go to court over an issue in their co-op. They say that this process is expensive and time-consuming for both the co-operative and the member involved.

This is an expense that is often prohibitively expensive for both parties. They are frustrated that tenants in rental properties seem to have better access to dispute resolution mechanisms, such as the Landlord and Tenant Board, than they do. They have asked me why our government has yet to help them reform this process, and I think this is a fair question.

Speaker, through you to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, could you please explain what Bill 14 would do to help co-ops and their members with these costs?

Hon. Linda Jeffrey: I just want to start by congratulating the member from Scarborough-Guildwood on her successful election and her question in the House.

This is a very timely question, because Bill 14 is actually going to committee today, and I know we have a number of members of the co-op housing—the hard-working members here today.

I want to remind the entire House about the important role that co-op housing plays in providing affordable housing to Ontarians across this province. However, cooperatives have what can only be described as a complicated and expensive dispute resolution process: having to use the courts. That is unlike most tenants and landlords in Ontario, who are able to access the Landlord and Tenant Board to resolve a variety of disputes without involving courts or pricey lawyers. It's an issue of fairness for those who are least able to afford the costly court process. That's why our government introduced Bill 14 and that's why we urge the opposition and the third party to work with us and pass Bill 14. It's time to—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Supplementary?

Ms. Mitzie Jacquelín Hunter: Thank you, Speaker. I would like to ask the minister, through you—because I've heard from some people in Scarborough-Guildwood that they are confused about how this bill is different from an earlier one. They have heard about an amendment that would allow the Landlord and Tenant Board to waive application fees. This causes many of them to worry that this would only increase the number of cases being heard by the Landlord and Tenant Board, leading to longer delays and less justice for tenants.

While I am new to the Legislature, I know there have already been questions in this House about this very issue.

Speaker, through you to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing: Could the minister explain how the fee waiver to the Landlord and Tenant Board would work and the rationale for including it?

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Minister? Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Attorney General, you're not helping.

Hon. Linda Jeffrey: —I want to comment that also the member from Leeds-Grenville raised this issue—

we've had this debate in the House—and previously questioned why we included this amendment.

In short, the reason we proposed this amendment was to ensure fairness for all Ontarians no matter what their income. Currently, all applicants to the Landlord and Tenant Board have to pay a fee to have their case heard, unlike many of our other boards and tribunals, meaning that a tenant whose only source of income is a disability benefit might have to choose between seeking redress at the Landlord and Tenant Board or paying for groceries.

Our government believes that no Ontarian should have to make that choice. At the end of the day, Mr. Speaker, this amendment would mean that all Ontarians, whether they're rich or poor, would have the same access to justice.

MEMBERS' PRIVILEGES

Mr. John Yakabuski: My question is for the Premier. Premier, yesterday in justice committee, your predecessor's former chief of staff, David Livingston, once again came up with a case of selective amnesia. He had a hard time recalling his role in your Liberal gas plant scandal. To make matters worse, he saw nothing wrong with his deleting emails and breaking document retention laws.

Week after week, Liberal staffers have come before the committee and either said they don't recall or have deliberately misled members of the committee. Premier, when are you going to start taking your party's flagrant abuse of taxpayers seriously, instruct your former staff to co-operate with the committee and finally start providing some answers?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Government House leader.

Hon. John Milloy: Mr. Speaker, the fact of the matter is that on this side of the House, those members who have been called to appear in front of the committee have, including Mr. Livingston, who was mentioned.

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It's very interesting, Mr. Speaker, that, again, to go to the point of an answer I gave yesterday, the fact that the PC Party so aggressively was opposed to the plants, said they were the only party, if they formed government, that they would cancel them—what's interesting, Mr. Speaker, is over and over and over again we have asked those failed PC candidates—who had robocalls, who had tweets, who had press releases, who went around saying, "We're the only ones." We've asked them to come before committee to talk about their costing, to talk about their analysis, and there has been a concerted effort on the part of the PCs to make sure none of them would show up. So I ask the honourable member, in his supplementary, to tell us when he will encourage the PC candidates to show up and tell their side of the story.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. John Yakabuski: Back to the Premier. Premier, transparency is about providing answers, and you have failed miserably on that account. Current and former Liberal staffers have come before the committee only to have their testimony contradicted by senior bureaucrats.

There are emails indicating that senior Liberal operatives were plotting an attempt to influence the Speaker to change a ruling.

Premier, you don't want to get to the bottom of this scandal because you're afraid of what we're going to find. Will you commit today—and changes can only be made here. It's not about letting the committee work. Your House leader has a job to do. Will you commit to instructing him today to expand the scope of the committee, the mandate of the justice committee, to include asking questions about your Liberal operatives' attempts to influence the Speaker? And will you finally—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock. Be seated, please. I will—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): It's really tough from this spot. I've ruled on this once before, and it's the second time I'm asking the member to stay away from an already-ruled-upon issue. Rephrase the question to include what you're looking for but without the issue that has been ruled on.

Mr. John Yakabuski: As I said before, will you finally instruct your staff and advisers to regain their memory and tell the truth?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Government House leader.

Hon. John Milloy: Mr. Speaker, you know, it's a little bit disappointing, the games that that member is engaging in this morning here in the Legislature. He is an individual who knows the procedures of this House. An issue arose before the justice committee, and there were a number of different avenues that could be taken. His House leader decided, with very appropriate notice to you, Mr. Speaker—several weeks—to move ahead with a notice of privilege. As such, that was the route that they chose. Some of the other routes that we talked about at House leaders' meetings were not then available. The honourable member raised it through a letter, and you gave a very clear and fulsome ruling, Mr. Speaker. In light of that ruling, I am open, as the Premier said, to having further discussions with the House leaders. But I think your ruling was very instructive about the nature of the meeting and the nature of meetings that you have as Speaker, and that of course is a context that we would have in any further discussions.

COMMUNITY HEALTH CENTRES

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. Hamilton Urban Core is a community health centre in my riding that delivers care to some of the neediest people in the province. After 17 years of dedicated service, it's stuck in a cramped and broken-down building because of chronic underfunding. Now the LHIN wants to cram the CHC into an even smaller facility and cut oral health and foot care from their mandate, even though 18 other CHCs in the province offer these very essential services.

Will the minister show some leadership and step in to protect the vital services provided by the Hamilton Urban Core, or does she agree with the local LHIN that the CHC should be cutting vital oral health and foot care services to my constituents?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I am delighted to welcome members of the Urban Core CHC here. I am a big champion of CHCs. I think you know that. We've been able to expand 19 CHCs, new capital projects across the province. In fact, we've almost doubled the number of CHCs in this province. It is a fantastic model, Speaker. It provides holistic care to people who might face barriers to receiving the care that they deserve.

I know that the CHC and the LHIN are working together to find common ground. I want the Urban Core to know that I urge them to continue to work with the LHIN, to develop a plan to move forward so we can meet the needs of the people of downtown Hamilton.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, for months now my health critic has been urging the minister to get involved in this issue. I finally raised it with her personally yesterday. It is not the case that the LHIN is working with the CHC. In fact, it seems as if the LHIN is working against the CHC and against the people in my riding who need vital foot care and oral care services.

This is an unacceptable situation that this minister has known about for a very, very long time, and I am asking her very, very specifically: Does she or does she not believe that community health care centres should have a mandate that includes foot care and oral care, and does she or does she not believe it's her job to make sure that the people of this province get the health care services they deserve?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Speaker, our commitment to community health centres is clear. We have almost doubled the number of community health centres. We've almost doubled the number of people served by community health centres. We've increased funding by 140%.

Our commitment is very clear. Nonetheless, Urban Core must continue to work with the LHIN. That is the structure we have put in place. I urge the community health centre to continue to work with the LHIN to find common ground. I look forward to this moving forward, but there's work to do before it can move forward.

POVERTY

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: My question is for the Minister of Children and Youth Services. Mr. Speaker, I'm proud of our government's commitment to reducing poverty in Ontario. We've seen progress made through the efforts of the Poverty Reduction Strategy. This strategy aims to give children and their families the tools and support they need. There's a lot to be done when it comes to poverty and giving children and youth the best opportunity to reach their potential. Measuring our success is just as

crucial, as it allows us to enhance our strategy moving forward.

My question is, what have been the results to date of the Poverty Reduction Strategy and how has it assisted Ontario families?

Hon. Teresa Piruzza: I'd like to thank the member from Scarborough-Rouge River for this very important issue, one that I know resonates with many members in this House and across the province.

I'm proud of the progress we've made through the Poverty Reduction Strategy to date and our support for children and families. Current data indicates that 61,000 children have been prevented from falling into poverty. Additionally, 47,000 were lifted out. I'm very encouraged by these results.

We've been able to accomplish this through a range of programs and initiatives. For example, over 950,000 children in 510,000 families are being helped by the Ontario Child Benefit. As well, our Open Minds, Healthy Minds strategy has helped an estimated 35,000 young people deal with mental health and addiction. These are the ways in which we are investing in children and their families, building stronger communities and a healthier Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: Speaker, I would like to thank the minister for that response. I am pleased that we remain committed to reducing poverty and that our initial strategy has delivered results for families in Ontario.

In 2009, this government made a long-term commitment to combat poverty through the Poverty Reduction Act. A requirement of this act was that a new strategy would be developed every five years. It is my understanding that consultations have begun across the province on the development of a renewed strategy to continue to reduce poverty over the next five years.

I am personally taking part in a public consultation next month, along with my other Scarborough MPPs, to gain valuable input from our communities on the next strategy. Could the minister please inform the House—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Hamilton Mountain and the member from Hamilton East-Stoney Creek come to order.

Continue, please.

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: Could the minister please inform the House on the progress of these consultations and the steps being taken to reduce poverty in the province?

Hon. Teresa Piruzza: Thanks again to the member. I have to say that I'm proud that it's this government that brought forward the first provincial Poverty Reduction Strategy. It is this government that passed the Poverty Reduction Act.

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We are working on poverty reduction. We've been consulting with stakeholders to help develop our second strategy. I personally kicked off consultations in Windsor

on August 6 and also held one last week in Thunder Bay. What I'm finding is that people are pleased with the opportunity to provide their feedback on this issue. Their input is important to this issue. Poverty is a complex issue, and we need to hear from all voices. Our goal is that we hear from as many people as possible, and that's what we're working on, on the steps that need to be taken.

I want to encourage people across Ontario to participate in these consultations or provide feedback to us online. We know there's much more work to do. We all know there is, and these—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. New question.

PULMONARY FIBROSIS

Mrs. Christine Elliott: My question is to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. Minister, many Ontarians living with idiopathic pulmonary fibrosis are not able to obtain the medication that will help slow the progression of this terrible disease. Esbriet, a drug that has been proven to help manage the symptoms, is not at this time on the approved drug formulary. Patients have applied to the Exceptional Access Program to get funding for Esbriet but have been denied, with no clear answer for the denial.

This issue has been before the Committee to Evaluate Drugs for a very long time, yet no decision has been made, and there's no indication when a decision will be made. Minister, will you commit today to speaking with the committee with a view to obtaining a positive answer with respect to funding as soon as possible?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I do welcome people who are advocating for this drug today to the Legislature. I do want to say once again, though, that these are not political decisions.

We make decisions on what drugs to fund based on the evidence. There is a process that we go through when we make important decisions about what drugs to fund. With regard to Esbriet, the Canadian Drug Expert Committee has recommended that Esbriet should not be funded because of inconsistent results.

We remain open to new evidence, but at this point the evidence to support the public funding of this drug has not been presented to the Committee to Evaluate Drugs. So we clearly are open to new evidence, but at this time the evidence does not support funding.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Point of order.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Timmins–James Bay on a point of order.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Mr. Speaker, I seek unanimous consent to move a motion to pass the tanning beds legislation at second reading.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Timmins–James Bay has asked for unanimous consent to call second reading of the bill without debate and a vote. Do we agree? Agreed.

SKIN CANCER PREVENTION ACT (TANNING BEDS), 2013

LOI DE 2013 SUR LA PRÉVENTION DU CANCER DE LA PEAU (LITS DE BRONZAGE)

Resuming the debate adjourned on April 30, 2013, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 30, An Act to regulate the selling and marketing of tanning services and ultraviolet light treatments / Projet de loi 30, Loi visant à réglementer la vente et la commercialisation de services de bronzage et de traitements par rayonnement ultraviolet.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): On March 19, 2013, Ms. Matthews moved second reading of Bill 30. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Second reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Shall the bill be referred for third reading? I recognize—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): We've got this. I heard a no. Therefore, the bill is referred to committee. Minister of Health.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I move third reading of Bill 30, An Act to regulate the selling and marketing of tanning services and ultraviolet light treatments.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I'm not sure if the member from Renfrew remembers something. I hope he does.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): And I think you were reminding him.

Having said that, we still have to finish what we started. This bill has been, for second reading, into a committee. The minister has an opportunity to put it into the committee that she so desires.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Excuse me; I've got this. It doesn't preclude the minister from doing something else, but I need to get it to a committee.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Speaker, I would like to refer this to general government.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The bill is now referred to the general government committee. Minister of Health.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I move unanimous consent for third reading of Bill 30, An Act to regulate the selling and marketing of tanning services and ultraviolet light treatments.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I'm working through this. It's quite all right; I've got it. I think we may land where we want to land.

You're seeking unanimous consent to discharge the bill from committee, put it to third reading with no debate and passage. That is the unanimous consent. Do we have unanimous consent? I heard a no.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Order.

Therefore, the bill remains in general government committee.

There are no deferred votes. This House stands recessed until 3 p.m. this afternoon.

The House recessed from 1147 to 1500.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: Speaker, we're joined this afternoon by some members of the Canadian Pulmonary Fibrosis Foundation. They're sitting in the east members' gallery. With us today are Michael Jarvis, Ron Lillie and Jean Lillie. Please welcome them to Queen's Park.

Mr. John O'Toole: I also would like to recognize those persons suffering with idiopathic pulmonary fibrosis, looking for a cure in Esbriet, which is the immediate drug that they're requiring. My constituent Laurie Fowler, as well as Robert Davidson, who is the president of CPFF, the Canadian Pulmonary Fibrosis Foundation: Welcome to Queen's Park. I hope the ministry is listening.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Wonderful introduction, and only an introduction.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

ANNIVERSARY OF 9/11

Ms. Sylvia Jones: 9/11: Not so many years ago, 9/11 was just another date on the calendar, but that all changed 12 years ago today. 9/11 has become a solemn date that will forever be etched in our society's collective memory, for it was on this date, September 11, 2001, that thousands of innocent lives were lost, including 24 Canadians, in the despicable acts of terror that occurred in New York, Pennsylvania and Virginia.

9/11 is a date where people remember where they were when they heard the news. In a world before Twitter, we watched news commentators try to explain the unimaginable horror while watching the twin towers collapse, and we tried to understand why anyone would unleash such senseless violence on so many innocent people.

9/11 is now remembered for the destruction of the World Trade Center in New York City and the attempts on other targets, like the Pentagon. However, 9/11 will also be remembered for the bravery demonstrated by the many first responders, volunteers and citizens who did everything they could to help others during and after the devastation.

And so on this day, while we will never forget the unspeakable, reprehensible acts of murder that were committed 12 years ago, we will also never forget the amazing strength and unity free citizens of the world showed in condemning those terrible acts.

HEALTH CARE

Mr. Percy Hatfield: Until the end of September, it's time to get "Face to Face" with the Hospice of Windsor and Essex County. Now in its 11th year, Cogeco's John Fairley gets 500 ambassadors to ask for a \$10 donation from 10 friends. He's raised more than \$600,000 in this fashion, which support Canada's first and largest community-based hospice. The hospice services provided are at no cost to those who require them.

The Do Good Divas are gearing up for their annual Girls Night Out in Handbag Heaven. Some 1,200 women attend and raise funds for local health care services. This event features live and silent auctions of more than 300 handbags donated by celebrities, designers, retailers and generous members of the community. Over the past six years, this small non-profit group has donated more than \$350,000 to improve community health care services.

This year, the Do Good Divas will also be launching a new partnership with the Trillium Gift of Life Network to promote awareness and understanding of the importance of organ and tissue donation. Currently in Ontario, there are 1,500 people waiting for a life-saving organ transplant, and although 85% of Ontarians are in favour of organ donation, less than 25% have registered their consent to donate. The Do Good Divas are committed to increasing the level of donors in Windsor and Essex county.

PULMONARY FIBROSIS

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: It's a pleasure to rise today and inform the House that September is Idiopathic Pulmonary Fibrosis Awareness Month in Canada, something we should all pay a little bit of attention to, I think. It was established to increase awareness and understanding of this very rare disease. This important day and month is a reminder to all Ontarians of this debilitating and ultimately fatal disease, with no known cure.

It is estimated that up to 30,000 people in Canada are currently diagnosed with pulmonary fibrosis. Of those, between 5,000 and 10,000 suffer from IPF. Today, unfortunately, approximately 5,000 Canadians die each year from this deadly disease. It's a progressive and it's a life-limiting disease, and it's characterized by scarring in the lungs that hinders the exchange of oxygen and carbon dioxide in the body. It makes it extremely difficult for patients to breathe.

Robert Davidson is a double-lung-transplant recipient who founded the Canadian Pulmonary Fibrosis Foundation. Today, Mr. Davidson is leading a delegation of patients suffering with IPF at Queen's Park to educate us all about IPF. It was a pleasure to sit down with Robert Carew from my riding of Oakville to learn more about IPF last year.

So today, Speaker, I'd like to draw your attention to this month. I'd also like to welcome Robert Davidson, Robert Carew, Michael Jarvis again, Ron and Jean Lillie, and all members of the CPFF delegation to Queen's Park today.

PUBLIC TRANSIT

Mr. Victor Fedeli: This past spring, Metrolinx provided several options to pay for improvements to gridlock and transit in the Toronto and Hamilton areas. This included a 1% hike in the HST and a five-cent-a-litre gasoline tax. This did not go unnoticed in my riding of Nipissing or across northern Ontario. Also found in the gas plant documents were files outlining nearly 50 other provincial tax and fee increases to be considered, including a monthly phone bill surcharge, increased driver's licence fees—which we saw implemented last week—and new fees for hunters, fishers and park users.

Taxpayers in northern Ontario are already overburdened with demands by the provincial government on their pocketbooks, and residents in northern Ontario experience higher costs for many items, including heat and transportation.

I surveyed my constituents over the summer with a mailer, and they have spoken out loud and clear. I presented a petition Monday and have here 600 coupons that they returned. Interestingly, 222 of these coupons were hand-delivered to my office. We've never had traffic like that for any other issue of any of the mailings we've done. The message from Nipissing is clear: They are not willing to pay for the expansion of Toronto and Hamilton transit through taxes, fees, surcharges, or other mechanisms that burden the taxpayers of northern Ontario.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Hear, hear!

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I hope the member from Nepean—Carleton is okay. Just checking.

Members' statements: The member from Nickel Belt.

MINING HEALTH AND SAFETY

M^{me} France Gélinas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Let me take you to 1981: Prince Charles married Princess Diana, the first space shuttle launch took place, and an inquiry was held into mining safety. Fast-forward to 2013: Prince Charles has a new wife, the space shuttle has been retired, but the Occupational Health and Safety Act with respect to mining is still here.

MINES—Mining Inquiry Needs Everyone's Support—has been established to protect those working in Ontario's mining industry and prevent further workplace fatalities. The MINES committee is urging the government to call an inquiry into Ontario mining safety. Why? Because the last one is 32 years old, because there have been massive technological changes in mining, and because we have a better understanding of the link between environmental issues and health.

Why then is this Liberal government still refusing to hold an inquiry into mining health and safety? It is the people in my riding and the people in every mining community in Ontario whose lives are affected by those outdated regulations. I don't want to wait for another death. We owe it to the children in my riding who are growing up without their dads, we owe it to the brothers

and sisters who have lost a sibling, and we owe it to the moms and dads who have buried their sons and daughters due to mining accidents. Ontario needs an inquiry into mining health and safety. We have to do better. Merci.

ORLEANS CHILD CARE CENTRE

Mr. Phil McNeely: In August, I attended the 30th-anniversary celebration of the non-profit Orleans Child Care Centre. This particular milestone for owners Sam and Uttra Bhargava marks their third decade operating in our community, serving over 3,000 young children and their families over that period.

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Balancing work and life can be difficult for today's working parents, and finding reliable, safe and affordable child care can be a challenge. Not only have the Bhargavas and their committed staff been up to the challenge; they have provided high-quality service, innovated through the years, and have gone above and beyond what is expected of most child care centres.

Sam and Uttra's entrepreneurial spirit has not only been applied to their business but also to charitable and community endeavours as well. The couple has contributed \$1 million for Parkinson's research and launched a fundraising campaign for stem cell research for spinal cord injuries, and both are dedicated Kiwanians.

Since 1983, Sam and Uttra have been there for our families, and I expect they will be there for many more years to come, providing affordable, high-quality and personalized care for Orléans' young families.

While Orléans has changed dramatically over the past 30 years, the Bhargavas have been there. Today, many of their original students are now bringing their children to Sam and Uttra.

I want to extend my congratulations to the Bhargava family and want to thank them for their many years of service.

EAST NEPEAN EAGLES

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: I rise today as a proud MPP whose riding is home to Canada's championship Little League team, the East Nepean Eagles. Not only were they the provincial champions and then the national champions; they went all the way to Williamsport, Pennsylvania, to represent our nation very proudly at the international Little League, the world championship.

I was so proud of them. When they came home, they continued their successes by being recognized by the Rogers Centre and the Toronto Blue Jays.

I want to give a special congratulations to their coach Mark Keeping. Coach Keep we called him because we followed him on Twitter with the constant updates he was giving us for our team. And then, when they were being honoured by the Toronto Blue Jays, Coach Keep was the proud recipient of a compliment from John Gibbons, the manager of the Toronto Blue Jays, who said, "Maybe we should hire you." I couldn't agree more

because the East Nepean Eagles made us all proud and so did their coach.

But the news gets even better because not only have we feted them in our community in Barrhaven and all of the city of Ottawa being so proud of them, but in 2015, I want to take you all out to the baseball game when we host the international championships, the World Series of Little League baseball.

Let's all congratulate those champion baseball players, 11 years and 12 years of age. They did it. We're proud of them. Take me out to the ball game, Speaker.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Okay.

STOUFFVILLE SPIRIT

Ms. Helena Jaczek: I'm extremely happy to tell you that there is also great excitement in the town of Whitchurch-Stouffville in my riding of Oak Ridges-Markham. The Stouffville Spirit are a Junior A hockey team that play in the Ontario Junior Hockey League. They open their season at home this weekend with games tomorrow night and Sunday afternoon.

Founded in 1995, the Spirit play their home games at the Stouffville Arena and have a rich tradition of excellence both on and off the ice. In August, four of their players were selected to participate in the Ontario Summer Select Showcase. The showcase featured the best Junior A hockey players in the province. The Spirit had the second most players selected out of 40 teams.

However, what has truly impressed me has been their tremendous involvement in the Stouffville community. For example, players regularly visit local public schools where they emphasize to students the importance of literacy and education in our everyday lives. They also stress the very important notion that school always comes first when being a student athlete. The Spirit are also known for their annual appearance in the Stouffville Santa Claus Parade. Additionally, all proceeds from the 50/50 draw from their first two games this year will go towards the Stouffville Terry Fox Run. It is because of strong local partners like the Stouffville Spirit that the Stouffville Terry Fox Run is one of the most successful in the country.

Good luck this weekend, and go, Spirit.

PULMONARY FIBROSIS

Mrs. Christine Elliott: On behalf of the Ontario PC caucus, I would like to recognize Idiopathic Pulmonary Fibrosis Day at Queen's Park.

Today, there are an estimated 2,700 people in Ontario living with IPF and roughly 9,000 people in Canada. This disease is more common in men than women and is usually diagnosed between the ages of 40 and 80 years. Currently, there is no cure for IPF. This rare disease causes scarring of the lungs, making it increasingly difficult to breathe. Patients experience increased shortness of breath and reduced physical functioning, with a median survival rate of two to five years.

Today we welcome Robert Davidson, the president of the Canadian Pulmonary Fibrosis Foundation. Robert is joined by other patients currently living with IPF. I'd like to welcome Michael Jarvis, Henry Lowi, Larkell Bradley, Ron Lillie, Connie and Hugh Detzler, Laurie Fowler and Roger Chandler, and their families. The Canadian Pulmonary Fibrosis Foundation will be hosting a reception at 5:30 today in the dining room, and I certainly encourage all members to attend and learn more about IPF and the means of dealing with it through medications.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

INTER-PROVINCIAL IMPORTATION OF WINE, BEER AND SPIRITS ACT, 2013

LOI DE 2013 SUR L'IMPORTATION INTERPROVINCIALE DE VIN, DE BIÈRE ET DE SPIRITUEUX

Mr. Milligan moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 98, An Act respecting the importation of wine, beer and spirits from other provinces / Projet de loi 98, Loi concernant l'importation de vin, de bière et de spiritueux provenant d'autres provinces.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member for a short statement.

Mr. Rob E. Milligan: This bill amends the Liquor Control Act to add a provision that permits individuals who are 19 years of age or older to import, or cause to be imported, wine into Ontario from other provinces if the wine is for their personal consumption and not for resale or other commercial use. The Liquor Control Board of Ontario's powers do not apply to wine imported by an individual in accordance with that provision.

The government of Ontario is required to encourage the parties to the agreement of internal trade to implement or amend measures to allow for the free movement of wine within Canada. A progress report must be tabled in the Legislative Assembly within three months after the bill comes into force and every six months thereafter.

Similar provisions are added with respect to the importation of beer and spirits from other provinces. Those provisions only apply if the Importation of Intoxicating Liquors Act of Canada authorizes the inter-provincial importation of beer or spirits, as the case may be.

MOTIONS

Hon. John Milloy: I seek unanimous consent to move the following motion with respect to Bill 30 and that the question be put without debate or amendment:

I move that the Standing Committee on General Government be authorized to meet for two sessional days for the purpose of public hearings on the bill, from 9 a.m. to noon and from 1 p.m. to 5 p.m. commencing on Wednesday, September 18, 2013; and

The committee is authorized to meet for one sessional day for the purpose of clause-by-clause consideration of the bill on Wednesday, September 25, from 9 a.m. to noon and from 1 p.m. to 5 p.m.; and

The deadline for filing amendments to the bill with the Clerk of the Committee shall be 5 p.m. on Tuesday, September 24, 2013. The committee shall report the bill to the House on the sessional day following the day on which the committee met for clause-by-clause consideration of the bill; and

That upon receiving the report of the committee, the Speaker shall put the question for adoption of the report forthwith, and at such time the bill shall be ordered for third reading. In the event that the committee fails to report the bill on the sessional day following clause-by-clause consideration, the bill shall be deemed to be passed by the committee and shall be deemed to be reported to and received by the House, and shall be deemed to be ordered for third reading; and

The order for third reading of the bill shall be called no more than three sessional days after the bill is reported; and

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When the order for third reading is called, three hours shall be allotted to the third-reading stage of the bill, apportioned equally among the recognized parties. At the end of this time, the Speaker shall put every question necessary to dispose of this stage of the bill without further debate or amendment, and the vote on third reading may be deferred pursuant to standing order 28(h), and in the case of any division relating to any proceedings on the bill, the division bell shall be limited to five minutes.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Mr. Milloy—

Mr. Gilles Bisson: No.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): You can say it all you want, but I've got to say it first.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Just making sure you know.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Yes, you're making sure I know a lot.

The government House leader is seeking unanimous consent to put the motion forward. Do we have consent? I heard a no.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Point of order.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Timmins–James Bay on a point of order.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Mr. Speaker, you would know that subcommittees in this House do meet, and there's going to be a subcommittee meeting this afternoon in regard to this particular committee. That is the place to deal with that, and we are prepared to allow that bill to have essentially what you've put inside this time allocation

motion, but it's done by the regular methods. We will move that in fact at committee—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I appreciate what you are attempting to do, member from Timmins–James Bay. That's actually not a point of order, but I would like the member to know that I tried to give him enough leeway to make that point. At the same time, being challenged from time to time is not helpful.

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

STUDENT ASSISTANCE

Hon. Brad Duguid: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The House leader gave me a bit of a start when he got up at the same time I did, but there are no crossed signals there, which is good from my perspective.

This is an exciting time of year, I think, for all of us. This week, more than 568,000 students are returning to class at colleges and universities all across Ontario. As the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities, I want to wish every student an exciting and successful year of study.

I want to note that this year's enrolment represents another record for our post-secondary system. This shows that our young people, like the government of Ontario, understand the importance of a post-secondary education in ensuring their future successes. A post-secondary education continues to be one of the best investments a student can make in his or her future. It's also an investment in Ontario's future, because it means we can continue to build the highly skilled workforce we need for a strong, modern economy. That's why we have made record investments in our post-secondary education system, investments that include student financial aid.

Our government is holding firm to its commitment to help students get the education and training they need: help that is based on the ability to learn, not the ability to pay. I'm proud to say that Ontario has one of the most generous student financial aid programs in all of Canada. Last year, we invested \$1 billion in grants and loans, including the 30% off tuition grant. OSAP helped more than 370,000 students. The 30% off tuition grant helped nearly 230,000 low- and middle-income students pay for their post-secondary education, and the tuition grant keeps pace with increases in tuition. This year, students in a university or college degree program will save \$1,730 on tuition, while students in a college diploma or certificate program will save \$790.

Our improvements are not limited to new grants for students. We've also improved the process for students to get their OSAP. If you visit campuses across the province this week, you won't find long lineups of students at their financial aid offices, thanks to OSAP express. Starting last year, we cut the red tape and streamlined the application process for full-time college and university

students. One change was to have their aid deposited directly into their accounts.

These investments and improvements are working. The results are clear. We have 161,000 more students attending colleges and universities than there would have been 10 years ago. Our attainment rate for post-secondary education has increased to 65%, the highest in the OECD. This is good news for students of Ontario. This is good news for the people of Ontario.

Once again, today I offer my congratulations to all the students who have made a choice to pursue post-secondary studies. Whether they're starting their first year or whether they're close to graduation, they have made a firm commitment to their future and ours.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): It's now time for responses.

Mr. Rob Leone: I'm pleased to rise on behalf of the Ontario PC caucus to talk about a subject I know quite a bit about. I remember the days when I was in university for three degrees, actually, so the 10 or 11 years when this was the first day of school. I know that students always came to school with a lot of enthusiasm. They were excited to start their new classes; they were excited to start their learning and they were excited to see their peers, their colleagues, and to do what I think a lot of people want, which is not only to learn inside the classroom but also to learn outside the classroom.

Mr. Speaker, I have a connection to the campus that was in your riding, actually, Wilfrid Laurier University's Brantford campus, which was the final appointment that I had prior to entering politics. So I know it's a pretty important time of year in your riding as well, Mr. Speaker.

I'm very pleased to discuss this issue with members of this Legislature. I know students are very concerned always about the accessibility and affordability of their education, and it's something that we in the Ontario PC caucus care deeply about as well. In addition to the discussions that have been had with respect to—and I know all members of this Legislature have received commentary on the Ontario tuition grant.

What I want to point out is that I think a lot of students feel a little bit uneasy about what has transpired because, during the election of 2011, we heard that this Ontario tuition 30%-off grant was going to apply to all students. In reality, three in five students in the province of Ontario aren't getting this Ontario tuition grant—three in five students, and this was a policy that was designed to apply to all students.

In fact, on September 5, there was an email issued by the Ontario Liberal Party that said in the subject line, "All students can go back to post-secondary education." Well, if you're a student who's actually more than four years out of high school, you don't qualify for this grant. If you're a part-time student in the province of Ontario, you don't qualify. If you're a mature student—perhaps you're a single parent who in the early years wanted to raise children and wanted to go back to school—you don't qualify for this grant. There are so many loopholes

that were built into the policy that three in five students in the province of Ontario simply do not qualify for this grant.

To make matters worse, Mr. Speaker, in order to fund this grant, the government actually had to take away other scholarships and grants that applied before. So a student who actually was receiving a merit scholarship, for example, might have been able to receive that scholarship, but today that scholarship no longer exists. So they're losing twice. They're not getting the Ontario tuition grant and they're not getting the merit scholarship or grant that they had previously been awarded.

What makes me very interested is that I've been in this Legislature for almost two years—I understand that this is a topic that is of vital importance to this government, but it's also of vital importance to all members of this Legislature—and we haven't seen anything new. We're talking about old news. We're talking about an Ontario tuition grant that was talked about in the last election. Two years from that election, we still don't have a new policy. We've had lots of round tables; we've had lots of consultations; we've had lots of discussions—

Mr. Rob E. Milligan: Conversations.

Mr. Rob Leone: "Conversations"; that's the word.

We've had lots of conversations but we've had very little action in terms of what we can do to have more people go to school and be able to afford it better. There has been not one cost-cutting measure that could be implemented, or perhaps having more time devoted for professors to do their teaching: The administration costs in our colleges and universities have skyrocketed, but nothing has been done to actually look at the costs of university and college education in the province of Ontario. There are very simple solutions that can be had. Tough decisions obviously need to be made, but we have not seen from this government any semblance of a desire to actually get to the heart, get to the root, of why tuition consistently goes up year after year after year.

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I hope that the next time the minister stands in this Legislature to talk about post-secondary education, they actually have some tangible solutions to get the costs down and get more folks into schools and into jobs at the end of the day once they graduate.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Further responses?

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: I want to take a moment to congratulate our new and returning college and university students as they begin a new academic year. Pursuing a post-secondary education is an important journey, personally and professionally, and I wish all Ontario students the very best. Frankly, they're going to need it, given this government's approach to their future.

After listening to the achievements claimed by the minister, it is clear that they have bought into their own rhetoric and are hoping Ontario families do too. It's difficult to hear how they are prioritizing training, colleges and universities in Ontario when they have changed ministers almost as frequently as they have changed their minds on subways.

Let's examine the evidence and, more importantly, the reality of the situation for Ontario students and their families.

Today, the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives released their report, Degrees of Uncertainty. I quote: "Average tuition and compulsory fees in Canada have quadrupled since 1990, and according to the study, Ontario is the province with the highest fees and will see its tuition and other fees climb from \$8,403 this fall to an estimated \$9,517.... Newfoundland and Labrador remains the province with the lowest compulsory fees of \$2,872 ... rising to an estimated \$2,886...."

This government has no plans and no ideas to bring skyrocketing tuition fees under control. They laud their 30% tuition grant reaching almost 230,000 students, which is a good start; I grant them that. However, the reality is, their solution unfortunately excludes two thirds of all Ontario's PSE students. There are more than 900,000 PSE students in this province. Excluding almost 700,000 students from a plan to help with tuition is just bad math.

According to OCUFA, the Ontario Confederation of University Faculty Associations, in the last 10 years Ontario has invested less per student than any other province in Canada: "Universities in Ontario receive less funding per student than any other province in Canada. And per-student funding for Ontario universities has been in steady decline over the past two decades."

They go on to say that "continued enrolment increases and stagnant public funding mean that per-student dollars are once again in a worrying decline." This decline in per-student funding and investment means this government has prioritized our tax dollars on gas plants, eHealth and Ornge, instead of finding real answers to their chronic underinvestment in PSE.

The minister claims a commitment to providing our students with a great start and says how vital students are to building a stronger economy, yet he and his colleagues have continued to ask Ontario families to pay more and had asked our colleges and universities to do more with less, which can be understood by the rest of us as, "We still aren't giving you the funding you require."

We have all heard the arguments that things are more expensive now and that times have changed, and I agree with that sentiment. In fact, I know students' lives have changed dramatically since I and many of us here today went to college or university.

In the past, we could afford to work for a summer and save enough money to pay for our tuition for the coming year. This is no longer the case. Today, PSE students are borrowing more than ever and are unemployed in record numbers. Those who are working are typically in unpaid internships that demand excessive overtime hours; in other words, cheap free labour.

Ontario families and students deserve the best education we can give them, and I am disappointed that this government refuses to live up to its promises.

My suggestion? I encourage this government to go back to school, but quite frankly, they may not be able to afford it.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Further responses? I thank all members for their comments. It is now time for petitions.

PETITIONS

SUBSTANCE ABUSE SERVICES

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: I've got a petition that I'm reading on behalf of the member for Toronto Centre, and it says:

"A 2011 study by the World Health Organization of the burden of disease indicates that alcohol ranks second out of 26 risk factors for death, disease and disability, behind tobacco but ahead of other health risks such as overweight and obesity, physical inactivity, illicit drug use, unhealthy diet and others...."

"We are asking you to find solutions for alcoholics and their families. Since the government of Ontario controls and sells the very substance that creates this desperate social problem, we believe the responsibility falls to the government to correct the ills it helps create."

"Therefore we, the petitioners, ask the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to urge the government of Ontario to introduce legislation similar to the Marchman Act, progressive legislation in the state of Florida, that provides an individual in need of substance abuse services with emergency services and temporary detention for substance abuse evaluation and treatment when required, either on a voluntary or involuntary basis."

"This legislation should empower family members or friends when a person suffering from alcohol or drug addiction abuse is incapable of appreciating the need for their own care or for the health of their unborn child."

I agree with this petition, will sign it and send it down with Aly.

LONG-TERM CARE

Mr. Jim McDonell: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas Ontario ranks ninth of 10 provinces in terms of the total per capita funding allocated to long-term care; and

"Whereas the Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care data shows that there are more than 30,000 Ontarians waiting for long-term-care placements and wait-times have tripled since 2005; and

"Whereas there is a perpetual shortage of staff in long-term-care facilities and residents often wait an unreasonable length of time to receive care, ... to be fed; to receive a bath; for pain medication. Since 2008, funding for 2.8 paid hours of care per resident per day has been provided. In that budget year, a promise was made to increase this funding to 4.0 hours per resident per day by 2012. This has not been done; and

"Whereas the training of personal support workers is unregulated and insufficient to provide them with the

skills and knowledge to assist residents who are being admitted with higher physical, psychological and emotional needs. Currently, training across the province is varied, inconsistent and under-regulated;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to:

"(1) immediately increase the number of paid hours of nursing and personal care per resident per day to 4.0 hours (as promised in 2008);

"(2) develop a plan to phase in future increases so that the number of paid hours per resident per day of nursing and personal care is 5.0 hours by January 2015;

"(3) establish a licensing body, such as a college, that will develop a process of registration, accreditation and certification for all personal support workers."

I agree with this petition and will be signing off and passing it off to page Jasper.

FAMILY SAFETY

Mr. Bob Delaney: I have a petition addressed to the Ontario Legislative Assembly for which I'd like to acknowledge a number of individuals who sent it to me from Toronto, Burlington and the Hamilton area. It reads as follows:

"Whereas the Safer Families Program is a successful partnership of Catholic Family Services Peel-Dufferin, Family Services of Peel and the Peel Children's Aid Society (CAS), receives year-to-year funding from the Ontario Ministry of Children and Youth Services, and is a critical component of social services to families within the Peel community; and

"Whereas the intervention model for Safer Families currently operates with no waiting lists, an important consideration for families experiencing domestic violence and child protection concerns, as they require immediate access to service; and

"Whereas the Safer Families Program is aligned with Ontario's child poverty agenda, is committed to preventing violence against women, and contributes to community capacity building to support child welfare delivery; and

"Whereas currently, Safer Families serves 14% of all domestic violence cases referred to Peel Children's Aid Society and has the" capacity "to double the number of cases it handles;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the government of Ontario adjust its funding to supply ongoing core funding rather than year-to-year funding, and realign funding to double the percentage of cases referred by the Peel Children's Aid Society and served by the Safer Families Program."

I completely agree with this petition. It's a valuable program. I'm pleased to affix my signature to this petition and to send it down with page Massoma, who is from Mississauga-Streetsville.

1540

FAMILY CAREGIVER LEAVE

Ms. Soo Wong: I have a petition to the Ontario Legislative Assembly.

"Whereas the people of Ontario deserve to be able to look after their sick or injured family members without fearing that they will lose their jobs at such a vulnerable time;

"Whereas the people of Ontario deserve to be able to spend time looking for a child that has disappeared, or take time off to grieve the death of a child that" has been "murdered without fearing that they will lose their jobs;

"Whereas the federal government has recently extended similar leaves and economic supports to federal employees;

"Whereas the government of Ontario, and the Premier of Ontario, support Ontario families and wish to foster mental and physical well-being by allowing those closest to sick or injured family members the time to provide support free of work-related concerns;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Legislative Assembly of Ontario pass and enact, during spring of 2013, Bill 21, the Leaves to Help Families Act."

I fully support the petition and will give the petition to page Gabrielle.

TIRE DISPOSAL

Mr. Jim McDonell: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas the Ontario government has approved massive increases to Ontario Tire Stewardship's eco fees for agricultural tires, increasing some fees from \$15.29 to \$352.80, \$546.84 or \$1,311.24;

"Whereas Ontario imposes tire eco fees that are dramatically higher than those in other provinces;

"Whereas other provincial governments either exempt agricultural tires from recycling programs or charge fees only up to \$75;

"Whereas these new fees will result in increased costs for our farmers and lost sales for our farm equipment dealerships;

"Whereas the PC caucus has proposed a new plan that holds manufacturers and importers of tires responsible for recycling, but gives them the freedom to work with other businesses to find the best way possible to carry out that responsibility;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To suspend the decision to significantly increase Ontario Tire Stewardship's fees on agricultural and off-the-road tires pending a thorough impact study and implementation of proposals to lower costs."

Thank you. I'll be passing this off to page Bridget.

TIRE DISPOSAL

Mr. John O'Toole: My petition from the constituents in the riding of Durham reads as follows:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the Ontario government has approved massive increases to Ontario Tire Stewardship’s eco fees for agricultural tires, increasing some fees from \$15.29 to \$352.80, \$546.84 or \$1,311.24;

“Whereas Ontario imposes tire eco” fee taxes “that are dramatically higher than those in other provinces;

“Whereas other provincial governments either exempt agricultural tires from recycling programs” or charge a modest fee of \$75;

“Whereas these new fees will result in increased costs for our farmers” and a loss of sales for our farm equipment dealers; and

“Whereas the PC caucus has” approved “a new plan that holds manufacturers and importers of tires responsible for recycling, but gives them the freedom to work with other businesses to find the best way possible to carry out that responsibility;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“Please suspend the decision to significantly increase Ontario Tire Stewardship’s fees on agricultural and off-the-road tires pending a thorough impact study and implementation of proposals to lower costs.”

It appears to me that the ministry did listen to this. I’m pleased to present this to Taylor, one of the pages.

PUBLIC TRANSIT

Ms. Soo Wong: I have a petition addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“Whereas Scarborough residents north of Ontario Highway 401 and east of Don Mills are without a rapid transit option; and

“Whereas a strong transit system is critical for increasing economic development and tackling income disparity; and

“Whereas this geographical area continues to grow and the demand for strong rapid transit continues to increase; and

“Whereas Sheppard Avenue is a major artery for automobile traffic for commuters travelling from suburbs to downtown Toronto, and travelling from suburb to suburb; and

“Whereas ground-level rapid transit would increase traffic, restrict lanes for automobiles, and add further risk for pedestrians and commuters at dangerous intersections along Sheppard Avenue; and

“Whereas demands for underground rapid transit along Sheppard Avenue have been part of public discourse for over 50 years; and

“Whereas the province of Ontario previously approved a plan from the city of Toronto to extend the Sheppard subway line from Downsview to Scarborough Centre; and

“Whereas an extension to the Sheppard subway line will require contributions and co-operation from the city of Toronto, the province of Ontario and the government of Canada;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“To support the extension of the Sheppard subway line east to Scarborough Centre; and

“To call upon all levels of government to contribute” a multi-year plan “for the construction and operation of an extension to the Sheppard subway line.”

I fully support the petition and give my petition to page Aly Muhammad.

PHYSIOTHERAPY SERVICES

Mr. Jim McDonell: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“Whereas the Ministry of Health is planning major changes to the provision of OHIP physiotherapy services as of August 1st; and

“Whereas this will drastically reduce the number of allowable treatments to 12 per year for people who are currently eligible for 100 treatments annually; and

“Whereas funding for physiotherapy services to seniors in long-term-care homes would be cut by almost 50%, from an estimated \$110 million per year to \$58.5 million per year; and

“Whereas ambulatory seniors in retirement homes would have to travel offsite for physiotherapy; and

“Whereas under the changes scheduled for August 1, the cost of visits under the CCAC (community care access centre) model will rise to \$120 per visit, rather than the current fee of \$12.20 per visit through OHIP physiotherapy providers; and

“Whereas these changes will deprive seniors and other eligible clients from the many health and mobility benefits of physiotherapy;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“That the delisting of OHIP physiotherapy clinics as of August 1st not proceed and that the provincial government guarantee there will be no reduction in services currently available for seniors, children and youths, people with disabilities and all those who are currently eligible for OHIP-funded physiotherapy.”

I agree with this petition and will be passing it off to Ian.

HORSE RACING INDUSTRY

Mr. John O'Toole: I won’t read the petition on the tire stewardship thing. This is another issue, though.

“Whereas the Ontario horse racing and breeding industry generates \$2 billion of economic activity, mostly in rural Ontario;

“Whereas more than 60,000 Ontarians are employed by the Ontario horse racing and breeding industry;

"Whereas 20% of the funds generated by the OLG slots-at-racetracks program is reinvested in racetracks and the horse racing and breeding industry, while 75% is returned to the government of Ontario;

"Whereas the OLG slots-at-racetracks program generates \$1.3 billion a year for health care and other spending, making it the most profitable form of gaming in the province for OLG;

"Whereas the government has announced plans to cancel the slots-at-racetracks program, a decision that will cost the government \$1.1 billion a year and threatens more than 60,000" agricultural "jobs;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly as follows:

"Call on the" Kathleen Wynne "government to:

"(1) protect the \$1.1 billion of revenue the government received annually because of the OLG slots-at-racetracks program;

"(2) direct OLG to honour the contracts with racetracks and protect the horse racing and breeding industry by continuing the OLG slots-at-racetracks revenue-sharing program."

I'm pleased to sign and support this—this is the right thing to do for Ontario—and present it to Taylor, once again, who is a hard-working page.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

FINANCIAL ACCOUNTABILITY OFFICER ACT, 2013

LOI DE 2013 SUR LE DIRECTEUR DE LA RESPONSABILITÉ FINANCIÈRE

Resuming the debate adjourned on September 11, 2013, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 95, An Act to establish a Financial Accountability Officer / Projet de loi 95, Loi créant le poste de directeur de la responsabilité financière.

1550

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Further debate?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I know my colleagues want to speak, so I'm not going to take a lot of time. I just wanted, for the record, to put a couple of things in the record from my perspective. What we have learned over the last number of years in this Legislature is that there are a number of instances where a government may be sometimes well intentioned—go out to try to do things—and end up boondoggling what it is that comes out the other end. What it ends up doing is costing the taxpayers, in certain cases, billions of dollars.

I look at this Liberal government since it came to power. It started with eHealth, I think an idea that we can all support in regard to trying to find a way to make records electronic when it comes to health care so that when you walk into a hospital or the doctor's office, the

information is available to all. We ended up doing what? Spending \$1 billion and mucking up the process.

Then the government said, "We're going to fix what was already a good air ambulance system," one that had a good mix between public and private, that delivered services on time at a good, reasonable price for the taxpayers of Ontario. The government decided, "Oh, well, you know, we know better. We're going to go out and reinvent the wheel," and they invented this thing called Ornge. We all know that we spent another \$1 billion to try to fix an air ambulance system that was already working.

Next, we end up with what has happened with these gas plants. The government ended up siting gas plants where nobody wanted them, and then ended up cancelling contracts that were signed in such a way that it could cost taxpayers between \$640 million, which is the bottom number, and \$1 billion.

There are \$3 billion of money that was expended that shouldn't have been. Andrea Horwath and the New Democrats are saying that we need some sort of accountability in the front end to make sure that those types of expenditures are looked at prior to the money actually being spent so that governments are less likely to do these types of things and get away with spending taxpayers' dollars in the way that they do.

I look forward to this bill going to committee. There need to be some amendments made. We note that the bill has got some issues that we have to deal with, but I think those are doable. I believe that in the end, when we finally do pass this legislation, we'll be in a position in Ontario where hopefully in the future we're able to prevent the types of fiascos that we've seen such as eHealth, Ornge and what happened with the gas plants.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Further debate?

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: I'm pleased to rise today to speak to the Financial Accountability Officer Act. I find it disappointing that I'm one of the few MPPs who will get an opportunity to speak to this bill.

This is a significant item: a creation of a Financial Accountability Office. After this government's out-of-control spending and waste, such as eHealth, million-dollar grants to cricket clubs, Ornge, and the gas plants, I understand the need for financial accountability. But, once again, this government is choosing political expediency over doing the right thing.

Creating a new servant of the Legislature is an historic undertaking. It should be done with careful consideration and full and open debate, and with all members of the Legislature having information they need to make an educated decision.

For those who don't recall, and for our five new members in the Legislature, I want to take a minute to talk about how we got to this point. Last spring, in an effort to get this budget passed, the Liberal government introduced a time allocation motion which not only limited debate on the budget bill that we were debating at the time; it included a requirement to introduce this bill and

limit debate and hearings on the bill, which, at the time, we had not seen. Mr. Speaker, that isn't fair, and it doesn't allow members to do the job that the people sent us here to do. The decisions that we make in this Legislature matter. We don't just take time to speak for the sake of speaking.

This Financial Accountability Office would be on a level with the Auditor General of Ontario, an office created by the Legislature in 1886. It would be equivalent to the Ombudsman of Ontario, which was created through the Ombudsman Act, which received royal assent on July 3, 1975. That act was introduced 13 years after the need for an Ombudsman was raised in the Legislature. It was introduced after 11 private members' bills to create an Ombudsman and after a commitment in a throne speech.

When this office was proposed, I read the debates from 1975, and it was interesting to see the concerns and proposals put forward by all the members. There was some great debate about what areas should fall under the Ombudsman and how broad or narrow the mandate should be. I found it interesting that the member from Sandwich-Riverside raised the concern that with the creation of a provincial Ombudsman, members wouldn't have to deal with constituency casework at all. I think we can all attest that that certainly hasn't been the case.

During the debate, the provincial secretary for justice stated, "Not only would the Ombudsman require the confidence of the members of this House, whom he serves, but he must also have the confidence of the public and the civil service." If this new legislative office is supposed to have the confidence of the members of the House, whom he serves, and the confidence of the people of Ontario, shouldn't we have a full, public debate? Shouldn't all members have the opportunity to speak to the creation of that office?

Reading through the many days of debate on the Ombudsman Act is quite a contrast with what we are being asked to do: vote on this bill only two days after it was introduced and with only two hours of debate—40 minutes for each party. If it passes in a few days, as laid out in the motion last spring, the bill would be pushed through the committee. Amendments to the bill are due the day after the hearings, which is the evening before clause-by-clause.

I'll admit that requiring amendments to be submitted in advance creates the benefit of allowing members to research the amendments before voting on them. However, it also limits debate and the ability of members to work together. It means that members only have the opportunity to look at amendments and vote "yes" or "no." There is no ability to make changes to the amendments. There is no ability for members to work together to come up with amendments that everyone could agree to. There is no ability for members to combine ideas from different parties to create amendments that work for the people of Ontario.

I remember that we put forward an amendment on an agricultural bill to allow the minister to create com-

mittees to ensure consultation. The government voted it down. The minister's office explained to my office that they liked the amendment, but they only wanted one committee; if we hadn't made it plural, the government would have supported it. But because the government forces through these programming motions, there is no ability to make changes to amendments in the committee, not even removing the "s" off "committees."

In total, the bill to create a new legislative officer will have four hours of debate in the Legislature—only four hours for all 107 members of this Legislature to raise their concerns, put forward proposals to improve the bill and share the concerns of their constituents. From a Premier and a government that are famous for offering conversations, this is shameful.

During the committee hearings on the Ombudsman Act, an NDP member said, "The Ombudsman, again, is a child of this House. He's not the child or the creation of the Premier of this province, nor in the first instance ought he have to attend on him." The government and the Premier are treating the Financial Accountability Office as if it belongs to them, not the members of this Legislature and the people they represent.

The people of Ontario are probably asking: If the creation of a Financial Accountability Office is so important, why is it being rushed through? The sad answer is that this is not truly about accountability or a desire of the government to do better. This is part of a backroom deal cooked up by the Liberals and the NDP. This deal was worked out behind closed doors to buy NDP support for the budget.

Ontario is being ruled by a coalition of big-spending parties. To see the impact of that coalition, all you have to do is look at page 208 of the budget and see that spending has actually increased by \$3.6 billion next year alone. All you have to do is look at the fact that next year the provincial deficit is forecast to increase to \$11.7 billion, even though the government is forecasting revenue increases. Under the Liberal/NDP government, spending continues to increase and Ontario sinks further into debt.

Should we have a Financial Accountability Officer? Looking at the increasing debt and the wasted money on eHealth, gas plants and Ornge, it seems like a good idea. But I'm disappointed that we won't have more of an opportunity to debate what the role of that Financial Accountability Office will be.

I think we need to have a broader discussion about what else the Financial Accountability Officer is required to do. As the bill reads now, there is no requirement for him to provide a costing on any government proposals unless requested to do so by a member of the Legislature or a committee. However, section 10 says that the Financial Accountability Officer may refuse a request from a member or a legislative committee.

I understand that allowing him to refuse a request from an individual protects his office from being used for political purposes. However, if a committee made up of members from all sides makes the request, I'm not sure

that the Financial Accountability Officer, a servant of the Legislature, should be able to refuse that request.

I find it ironic that we are being asked to support this proposal without knowing the full cost. We've been through not knowing the full cost before.

1600

On this side of the House, we have repeatedly raised the concern about government spending and finances, as have the people of Ontario. In fact, on the survey response to my householder last spring, it was one of the number one issues. I want to share a few of the comments I received.

A constituent from Tillsonburg said, "Cut taxes and stop spending like drunken sailors."

Another from Tillsonburg wrote, "The government must stop spending money it does not have. Everyone in government must be held accountable for their actions. Dalton McGuinty should be charged in court for wasting taxpayers' dollars."

From Brownsdale, I heard, "Government spending should be better and more fairly controlled."

A constituent from Princeton wrote, "I'm a small business owner. If I don't have the money I don't spend it. Government should run as a business. Cut spending and minimize costs."

A person from Woodstock said, "Quit spending money on things that are not necessary. Set rules and pay down deficit, just like other people do. There is no excuse for this high deficit." It's priority number one.

Eliminating the deficit is a priority for the people of Oxford and for the PC caucus. Mr. Speaker, the truth is that neither of the other two parties is prepared to make difficult decisions required to make our province better, get our financial house in order and eliminate the deficit.

Ontario needs to learn from the examples of governments across the world, like Greece, Italy and Spain, who are struggling to balance their books before ever-increasing interest payments on their countries' enormous debt plunge them into bankruptcy. That's not a path that Ontario should be on, but if something doesn't change, that's where we're headed.

We believe Ontario can and should do better. That's a conversation worth having, as is the conversation about how a Financial Accountability Officer could help us get there. It's too bad that this government, despite their claims to be willing to collaborate, is shutting that conversation down.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for giving me this opportunity—one of the few of us that is going to get it. I also do look forward to changes being made in committee to make sure that we get a bill that will actually work for the people of Ontario, not just satisfy the needs of the NDP in the province of Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Parkdale—High Park.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: Quite frankly, the member from Oxford has reason to be concerned about a Financial Accountability Office, because his cousins in Ottawa, who of course tried to put the kibosh on their budget

office, learned from the budget office in Ottawa that the fighter jets they were going to invest in didn't cost \$9 billion, they cost over \$30 billion, and that old age security, instead of being a loss leader, actually was a good investment. That's what the federal equivalent brought forward. So I understand that he's defending the Harper government in a sense.

But let me take you on a little walk down memory lane. When I was first elected some eight years ago here in this House, there was the \$1-billion eHealth scandal, followed shortly—and remember, back in those days, there was a little bit of a surplus. I remember a \$35-million surplus where \$1 million went to a cricket club. Remember that? We seem to have forgotten that in this debate, so I just remind the House of that: \$1 million to a cricket club who asked back then.

Then there was Ornge; again another billion-dollar kibosh, really, and money paid out not for the services that we expected but to well-connected Liberal insiders—that's the reality.

Now we have the gas plants being moved. Again that's mounting up. That's going to be—plus, by the way, the \$85 million, so we're adding by the minute, for the cancellation of the LRT, if they go ahead with the subway.

We're really, Mr. Speaker, up around the \$3-billion mark—\$3 billion of absolutely wasted money. That's in the time that I've had the privilege to sit here in this House—\$3 billion. Think of the housing that would build, think of the poverty that would alleviate, think of the tuitions that could pay for our college students, think of the young people that that could put back to work. That is money lost.

Now it's absolutely appropriate that constituents get upset and that they've lost faith in a government that after 10 years has managed to make such a mess of the finances. What the Financial Accountability Office will do is to give us a window in, give us the ability, before they waste any more money, to actually get a handle on the true costs of what they're proposing. That's what we're talking about—no backroom deal. Absolutely what our constituents demanded, what they said was necessary in order to keep the promises—again, remember Liberals and their promises: not a good track record there, either—we extracted from the budget in two budget negotiations.

I'll leave some time for my colleague from Davenport to say a few words on this. But again, \$3 billion is a lot of money to most Ontarians. That could have done a lot of good. Instead, it was wasted. We want to prevent that in the future. That's why we're supporting this.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Further debate?

Mr. Jonah Schein: I'm really pleased to stand here today and speak to G95, the bill that will bring financial accountability to the province of Ontario through a Financial Accountability Office. This is something that we have heard clearly and I have heard clearly from constituents in Davenport for a long time. They expect

government to work for them. They expect all members of this House to work in the public interest, not in their own interests. Too often, what we've seen in this House are members who have used their power here to serve their own purposes, to serve the interests of private interests and to serve their friends in high-up places.

In the last budget, just a few months ago, we went back to our constituents and we talked to them and we asked them what they wanted to see in the budget. What people told me in Davenport was that they didn't want an election just now; we just had an election. What they did want was for us to go back in here and make this place work and make it work in the public interest.

We listened and actually heard concretely from constituents in Davenport that we need in Ontario what we have at the federal level. We have a budgetary office in Ottawa that has done its job to try to hold the Harper Conservatives accountable. When the Harper Conservatives said that fighter planes will cost \$10 billion, that independent office was able to hold them to account and say that they're actually going to cost \$30 billion.

We need an ounce—we need more than an ounce—of that kind of accountability here in Ontario because what we've seen is this government that continues to use the public purse as if it's their own private purse. We see it for political purposes. We've seen it most recently in by-elections where we have a pressing public interest, which is public transit in this province and the GTHA in particular. Instead of creating a public transit plan that will serve most people, that will be respectful of people's dollars, we have a plan that's made on the back of a napkin in minutes and is to serve just the interests of getting the Liberals elected here in Scarborough. We've seen that with gas plants in the past.

When I talk to people in Davenport, they need that money. They need that money for child care; they need that money to put food on the table when they don't have work; they need that in their classrooms. These are billions of dollars that have gone to waste.

I'm pleased that we're here to put this into place to create a Financial Accountability Office that will create objective oversight for all members of this Parliament.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Further debate?

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: It's a pleasure to be rising today on behalf of the Ontario PC caucus with respect to Bill 95, the Financial Accountability Officer Act.

Obviously, this legislation was time-allocated, so members of this assembly didn't have the appropriate time to do two things. One is to do their due diligence on the bill and have the opportunity to provide their input on the floor of this assembly. Given that that has happened, we are not going to be able to fully explore this bill through questions and comments, as well as through our own debate.

The second problem with this, Speaker, is that we will now be time-allocated when we get to committee. I serve on the Legislative Assembly committee as the Vice-Chair. We just had a meeting moments ago to determine

when we would go into public hearings. Those will be time-allocated next week.

Let me give you an example of why that is a problem. Generally, when we want to talk about creating an officer of the assembly—a pretty important business—or we want to talk about government accountability or how we spend people's tax dollars, we may want to actually go out to the public and ask them if they're interested. Well, because of the time constraints that the government House leader has put upon us, we are now forced to try to notify people through the government website and through Canada NewsWire but we are unable to put ads in newspapers, particularly national newspapers like the National Post, the Toronto Star, the Ottawa Citizen and the Globe and Mail, where people read these notifications.

1610

Finally, I would just like to say this: I think this is an area where people may be inclined to speak on this bill, given some of the challenges we've seen over the past decade. My colleagues have previously talked about the cricket club receiving an inordinate amount of money. We have talked about eHealth in this chamber, we have talked about Ornge and we have talked about the gas plant scandal. I think people across Ontario, not just people who live in the city of Toronto, would like to participate in these hearings.

I remember that when I first arrived at this assembly eight years ago, the committees of this assembly would travel. They would go bring the assembly to the people of this province. That has effectively been stopped in this minority Parliament, and it has effectively been stopped because it has been time-allocated.

I have concerns that given what I've read in the bill—it is actually a very limited bill, but it does deal with the fact that the person who takes on this gets to be in the Ontario pension plan. But it doesn't give a lot more details other than that this person is pensionable. The fact is, from what I can understand, it's based off of the Parliamentary Budget Officer in the House of Commons. I find that a bit interesting, because from my experience, the person who occupied that post became very self-important, the individual thought he was the leader of the official opposition in the House, and he was often wrong.

A lot of people will talk about the F-35s, but I happen to know a little bit about it. I can tell you, in justice, my husband was director of policy to Peter MacKay—still is, actually. So I would often know that the numbers that this budget officer was providing to the public were not only wrong, they were astronomically wrong.

Then, this summer, I had an opportunity to go down to the United States, and I had the opportunity to meet with the company that does the F-35s. Without telling them I was from Canada, I said, "How much do these cost?" And the Americans and the people who were with the company at the time cited the exact same number that our defence department in Canada was citing publicly, but it was because of the wrong numbers of that Parliamentary Budget Officer, which could actually happen here, that I

have great concerns, because I think it speaks to the role of that assembly.

There is another comment I would like to bring forward, and I'll leave Kevin Page for a moment, because it is unfair to pick on him while he's not here. I'll have that opportunity next week, through committee, because, again, I think that he has done a disservice to the role that the NDP is now trying to pursue here at the Legislative Assembly.

But what I would like to say is, we have an Auditor General, and I sat in a committee today where the government—sorry, the government actually supported our motion, but the New Democrats tried to suppress us from asking for more financial information in terms of accountability. I find it a bit rich now that they don't want the auditor to do her job, yet they do want to create another legislative office.

I think that is a bit of a conundrum they face, because I can tell you, if you are going to want financial accountability, two things must happen. One is that you must expand the role of the auditor. The second is to ensure that the government of the day is actually following their own laws. Now, this isn't the first piece of accountability legislation we have debated in this House during the time I have been in office. We had one over Ornge. We had one over eHealth. In fact, there was actually even a public disclosure bill under my name called the Truth in Government Act. The government decided not to support that, and then they didn't follow their own two laws.

In fact, let's even talk about another law that they have actually overlooked. We all know about those local health integration networks. In fact, the leader of the third party talked about the LHINs today. There was supposed to have been a mandatory review of the local health integration networks, and that was by law of this assembly, by the very legislation that was created; and not only did that law take effect, but the government then decided to ignore it. That is the problem that we're going to have. So we can pass lots of legislation here, but you effectively can't legislate accountability. You can't really legislate ethics, particularly when the government of the day has neither.

So I challenge any member of this assembly to effectively communicate here how this budget officer, or the Financial Accountability Officer, is going to be able to do exactly what is required, given the government has continually brought forward legislation that they themselves have ignored when it comes to accountability.

I spoke earlier about Ornge and eHealth, and I've spoken about the cricket club, and I point this out: Even had this Financial Accountability Officer been in place, it would have been a rare find for them to actually find out what the numbers and the waste actually were. We are still scrutinizing, for example, this gas plant scandal, and we still don't have all of the information.

I was in two committees today: the Legislative Assembly committee this afternoon and public accounts this morning. I met the new auditor, Bonnie Lysyk, and

had a good conversation with her. She explained her mandate and what she hoped to achieve. She told us that we would finally be receiving the Auditor General's report on the gas plant scandal this mid-October. The ONTC report will be available in December, and—something very important to me—the OLG modernization review will be available this January. Speaker, I know—because this is an issue very important to you—that the horsemen and horsewomen across this province, particularly in rural Ontario, are going to be awaiting that very important report on gaming modernization across the province, because I think you know, as do members in the opposition, that the way in which modernization of our gambling in Ontario has occurred has been inconsistent and unfair and it has unjustly attacked rural Ontario. I am looking forward to seeing that report, particularly as it pertains to the Slots at Racetracks Program, as it pertains to the mental health and addictions plan of the OLG, as well as the dealings the OLG is having behind the public's back, because I think it's time for them to be accountable.

Therefore, I will go back to my point that the most appropriate person, in my view, to scrutinize the public finances of Ontario is the Auditor General. The Auditor General has been above partisanship.

If I look to the experience on Parliament Hill and I look at Kevin Page, he was the most partisan legislative officer I've ever seen. In fact, I felt at times, when I would read his comments, that he felt entitled to do the work of the official opposition.

Speaker, here I am today, sitting as a member of the official opposition for eight years, and I can suggest to you that we have a role to play.

Interjections.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: I understand we have members from the back who are heckling—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Well, it appears we have some very vocal members who aren't even sitting in the House. That'll stop, and the member won't entertain it while he's sitting here. Thank you very much.

Continue.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Thank you very much.

I would like to continue to point out that there is a role for members of this assembly. There is a role for the Auditor General. This bill is in place not to create better accountability—if the Liberals actually believed in that, they would have followed through, after eHealth and Ornge, and they would have supported my financial accountability package, the Truth in Government Act, but they didn't; they chose not to.

The reason this is before the House today, I'll tell my good friend Doug Holyday, our new member from Etobicoke—Lakeshore, is because no one in the government wanted an election, because they wanted to save their jobs, and they had to give in to Andrea Horwath and the NDP. So we have a bill in front of the assembly because the NDP were bought off by the Liberals with this Bill 95.

Interjection.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: They were bought off by Bill 95.

Hon. Jeff Leal: On a point of order—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Point of order from the Minister of Rural Affairs.

Hon. Jeff Leal: —informed opinion about the term “bought off.” That has interesting connotations. But I’ll leave it to your very good judgment in terms of the use of “bought off.” Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): You bring a very good point forward. I would suggest that the member from Nepean–Carleton might want to remove that phrase from her comment.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Speaker, I’m happy to withdraw, but I am going to continue to speak about how ill-advised—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): No, I don’t need a speech. I just need you to withdraw it.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: I withdraw. I’d like to continue to speak.

I look at this with utter amusement, because the only way the government thinks they can actually look after themselves is by creating another officer of the assembly. I think we all know that given the last year—they have given the runaround to the Information and Privacy Commissioner. They have not given us the full story in the justice committee, and they’re not prepared to give us the entire story on the teachers’ contracts. Why would we think they’re going to follow through and give the Financial Accountability Officer all of the details he requires?

Again, I go back. You cannot legislate ethics, and this government has very little of those, if they have them at all.

1620

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Further debate? Last call for further debate.

Pursuant to the order of the House dated June 5, 2013, I’m now required to put the question. Mr. Sousa has moved second reading of Bill 95, An Act to establish a Financial Accountability Officer. Is it the pleasure of the House that this motion carry? I heard a no.

All those in favour of this motion will please say “aye.”

All those opposed will please say “nay.”

I believe the nays have it.

Seeing five members, we’ll call in the members. This will be a five-minute bell.

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): “Pursuant to standing order 28(h), I request that the vote on Bill 95, Financial Accountability Officer Act, 2013, second reading be deferred until deferred votes on Thursday, September 12, 2013.”

Agreed? Agreed.

Second reading vote deferred.

EMPLOYMENT STANDARDS

AMENDMENT ACT

(LEAVES TO HELP FAMILIES), 2013

LOI DE 2013 MODIFIANT

LA LOI SUR LES NORMES D'EMPLOI

(CONGÉS POUR AIDER LES FAMILLES)

Resuming the debate adjourned on September 10, 2013, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 21, An Act to amend the Employment Standards Act, 2000 in respect of family caregiver, critically ill child care and crime-related child death or disappearance leaves of absence / Projet de loi 21, Loi modifiant la Loi de 2000 sur les normes d'emploi en ce qui concerne le congé familial pour les aidants naturels, le congé pour soins à un enfant gravement malade et le congé en cas de décès ou de disparition d'un enfant dans des circonstances criminelles.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Further debate?

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: I know it’s a great afternoon to be in the chamber, because you get to hear me speak about every single issue of the day. Whether that’s in question period, statements or the bills before us, I am happy to contribute.

I’m also happy to rise on behalf of the Ontario PC caucus and our critic Randy Hillier to discuss the Employment Standards Amendment Act (Leaves to Help Families), 2013. Obviously, we’re pleased to support this bill. We are, obviously, humbled and gratified and really excited that the government has taken our many concerns and listened to our constituents last session by making significant changes to this piece of legislation in order to improve the bill that we had some concerns with.

The legislation is actually going to eliminate inconsistencies between the federal labour code and our provincial labour laws, instead of creating new ones. I think a streamlined piece of legislation is something we can support. Something that eliminates inconsistencies and duplications is also, in my opinion, a good use of our time in order to discuss this legislation.

I’d like to point out that the bill is proposing several amendments to the Employment Standards Act to mimic similar changes the federal government made to the Canada Labour Code. I’d like to specifically point out that it introduces a proposed family caregiver leave for up to eight unpaid weeks per year.

Speaker, I think this is becoming increasingly important for two reasons, and I think I speak on behalf of all members of this assembly when we recognize two very serious concerns in our communities today. The first is parents with children who have special needs. I think, as we now start to see many parents both working in order to pay the bills and prepare their families, it’s really important that they have the opportunity to take this leave in order to look after their children.

The second thing is something that I think is becoming more important: the recognition of the sandwich

generation who maybe have a child at home but are looking after their mom and their dad. As we have a big baby boom move toward retirement and also toward seniors' residences, I think that is going to be very helpful.

To qualify for the leave, the employee must be caring for an individual whom a physician has deemed to have a critical injury or illness and cannot care for themselves. I think many of us have met people over the years in our own constituency offices who do require this assistance. That allows them to take the time to be with their family to help them recover or to assist them by taking them to medical appointments.

It will also mirror the family medical leave significantly, except that it will not include the provision of a significant risk of death within a 26-week period. It will introduce a critically ill child care leave and unpaid job-protected leave for up to 37 weeks for parents caring for a critically ill child.

This speaks to the compassion that members of this assembly have for the people we represent. Honestly, I think there's not a person here who wouldn't agree with that initiative and wouldn't agree with that plan. When a person has an ill child, we all think of them. We know the stress that they are under. Any child, we hope, is going to live a happy and healthy life, but that is not always the case. In these circumstances, it is important for all of us to show that type of compassion and understanding for that family and the issues that they are confronted with.

It will also introduce a crime-related child death or disappearance leave: an unpaid job-protected leave of absence for up to 104 weeks for an employee whose child dies if it is probably the result of a crime, or up to 52 weeks for an employee whose child disappears if it is probably the result of a crime.

I have met parents who have lost children, as many of us have, and if it is to a crime, it is, I'm sure, horrific. It is very hard for those moms and dads to continue with day-to-day life, let alone go to their work.

I had an experience, as many of you know, a few years ago in this House where a young man—he didn't die as a result of being murdered, but he was at school. There was an incident and he passed away on school property as a result of what he was doing in shop class. I fought hard to get a public inquest for Eric Leighton. I know his mom and his dad, Sheri and Pat, quite well. I've gotten to know them over the past two years. I see the pain, every time I've seen them in the past two years, of having lost their son. I know first-hand from working with them and seeing them in the community that it's difficult. That's why I think it's important to extend, at this time, a crime-related child death or disappearance leave because life really doesn't go on the same way if your child is not there. I speak on behalf of a parent. I myself wouldn't know what to do, Speaker, and I know you would be the same way.

I would just like simply, in the last few moments I have, to talk about the legislation and how it was

originally introduced. It was introduced as Bill 30, the Family Caregiver Leave Act. It was introduced in the last session. Unfortunately, we saw prorogation; we saw some changes. That is always a challenge, Speaker: having to start back at square one, particularly when you have legislation that could have been improved in the last go-round. But here we are, starting over.

It originally only contained provisions to introduce family caregiver leave without any proper consultation with our stakeholders or a demonstration that there was actually a need for these changes. I think the fact that the government has taken some of Randy Hillier's changes has made this bill more suitable. It is important, but this legislation does something which is quite good. Far be it from me to compliment the Liberal government, but I will compliment the move to eliminate those inconsistencies between the Canadian Labour Code and the Ontario Employment Standards Act.

In June 2013, the federal government, under Stephen Harper, will start paying out benefits for the federal equivalent of the proposed critically ill child care leave. That's a good thing because June 2013 has already passed. That means the federal government has made good on their commitment. That means that that is starting to occur.

As of January 1 last year, the federal government began providing grants lasting 35 weeks for the equivalent of the proposed crime-related child death or disappearance leave. The provincial legislation will incur no costs provincially; it will just protect the job from termination. That is a great relief to me because I think the initiative taken by the federal government under Stephen Harper's leadership is important. It is something that I support. That is why I am pleased to see that this extension is happening in our provincial Legislature. It is the right thing to do, and I think most members would agree with that.

1630

There are currently only two leaves available to workers in Ontario at the moment that are protected under the Employment Standards Act. The family medical leave is unpaid. It is job-protected leave of up to eight weeks in a 26-week period. And the eligibility, just for those at home who are watching, who may be concerned about this and may want to qualify—in order to qualify, you must be eligible by a qualified health practitioner, who would issue a certificate stating that the individual to be cared for has a serious medical condition with a significant risk of death occurring within a 26-week period.

Personal emergency leave is also a leave. Some employees have the right to take up to 10 days of unpaid job-protected leave each calendar year due to illness, injury and certain other emergencies and urgent matters. This leave is only eligible for individuals who work for a company that regularly employs more than 50 employees.

Speaker, I think what we're seeing as a whole here is a commitment by members of this assembly, regardless of

their partisan affiliation, to do more for those families who are dealing with very personal circumstances—health-care-related, death-related—in their families, and we're trying to be, I think, more compassionate, and by passing this act, we will be.

I am pleased to stand on behalf of Tim Hudak and Randy Hillier to discuss this bill. I think it's a good move for us to have this debate and ensure that as we move forward, we continue to improve legislation.

I might also say I'm pleased that I did have some time to speak to this and that this bill came forward because the NDP and the Ontario PC caucus together were able to have the tanning bed legislation moved forward into committee. I want to congratulate my colleague in the third party France Gélinas for doing her work over the past number of years to have that legislation put forward. Because of their efforts today and our efforts today, we now have that bill moving forward and we're able to focus on the Employment Standards Act this afternoon.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

M. Michael Mantha: C'est avec plaisir que je rejoins les commentaires de ma collègue de Nepean–Carleton sur la Loi modifiant la Loi de 2000 sur les normes d'emploi en ce qui concerne le congé familial pour les aidants naturels, le congé pour soins à un enfant gravement malade et le congé en cas de décès ou de disparition d'un enfant dans des circonstances criminelles.

Vous savez, la législation proposée ici est un bon pas par en avant. Elle est un petit pas par en avant. C'est vraiment une pièce de législation qui était extrêmement attrayante aux papiers et aux médias, mais en effet, c'est un petit pas comme je vous dis. Et puis, franchement, pour mettre, on va dire, un contenu dans ce projet de loi ici, pour certaines personnes qui se trouvent dans une position de prendre du temps pour être avec leurs membres de famille et les personnes qu'ils aiment le plus, le problème est qu'il n'y a pas de frais monétaire pour les compenser pendant le temps de maladie qu'ils passent avec leur famille. C'est un gros problème avec ce projet de loi.

Il y a seulement certaines personnes qui seraient dans une position pour prendre ce temps-là. Ce n'est pas tous les gens qui peuvent le prendre. Il faut qu'on regarde qu'il y a beaucoup de mamans et de papas qui travaillent les deux hors la maison et puis c'est difficile de prendre la décision financière. Il y a une perte d'un salaire qui rentre dans la maison pour prendre le temps. Ça fait que c'est vraiment une décision difficile. Mais c'est un bon pas. Au moins les gens ont la chance de prendre cette décision-là pour prendre soin de leurs bien-aimés. Et puis, c'est un petit pas. Je veux stresser ça, que c'est un petit pas et que c'est une belle annonce qui a l'air vraiment belle dans les papiers et les médias. C'est de valeur, mais c'est souvent ce qu'on voit et ce à quoi on s'attend de ce gouvernement. Merci beaucoup.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Hon. Jeff Leal: I was here for most of the address today by my friend and colleague the member from Nepean–Carleton on Bill 21. I thought her speech today was a very positive speech in many ways. It builds on the fine remarks that were delivered in this House yesterday by my friend from Prince Edward–Hastings.

We're seeing this momentum building on the side of the official opposition to get aboard and support Bill 21, which we see as particularly important. As I said yesterday to a wonderful audience in Peterborough—I think it was at the Peterborough Rotary Club, when I was asked a question about a week ago. I said, "We've got to remind ourselves, as Lester Pearson used to say when he was Prime Minister from 1963 to 1968, that when you're in a minority government position, we're all the government."

We all have the responsibility to make positive contributions—day in, day out, week in, week out, month in and month out. On this particular bill, and indeed on the Financial Accountability Officer and the tanning bed legislation, I think that in the last week, or few days, that we've been here, we've seen a real sea change in attitude. All three parties are coming together—the government, the official opposition and the third party—to really identify those pieces of legislation that are meaningful to the good folks.

I know that on Friday, when I'm at the East City Coffee Shop in Peterborough, having a chance to chat with my good friends and neighbours over lunch—you can still get a western sandwich and a coffee for under five bucks; I recommend that to people if you're in Peterborough—we'll have the opportunity to chat about Bill 21, chat about the financial officer and chat about the tanning bed legislation, to see that we are all moving together in the right direction on this bill. I want to thank the member from Nepean–Carleton.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Mr. Todd Smith: It's a pleasure to join the L-Mac show this afternoon here in the Legislature, and to bring some comments on her fine performance on Bill 21 here today. As the member from Peterborough, the Minister of Rural Affairs, mentioned, I had an opportunity yesterday to speak at length about this bill and talk about what it contains and what it doesn't contain.

Really, it doesn't contain much as far as the province is concerned. They're waiting for the federal government to bail them out in this situation, but what it does do is ensure that if anyone has suffered or sustained a traumatic experience in their family or has someone in their family who needs care at home, it gives them the opportunity to go and help their family members, which is well-intentioned and a very compassionate thing for the government to do.

But I can tell you, when I'm going out for an omelette at the Northway Restaurant on North Front Street in Belleville—a great family owns the Northway Restaurant, and I would encourage anybody that makes their way into Belleville to stop by and grab a coffee and an

omelette there; the western sandwich isn't bad either—they're not talking about the caregiver leave act at Queen's Park. I can tell you that the ladies who are hard-working in my constituency office—well, the office on Millennium Parkway just closed at 4:30, but the phones are probably still ringing by the dozens, every day, because people can't afford their hydro bills in rural Ontario.

They simply can't afford to pay the bills, and that's the number one issue the people in rural Ontario are facing right now. They're not so much worried about this bill, but this government is doing absolutely nothing about it. As a matter of fact, a story came out today that they're going to pay wind companies not to produce power. That's what's happening with the Green Energy Act. It has caused chaos on the grid. That's a priority for people in rural Ontario: getting those hydro bills under control.

While we will support Bill 21—and I think the comments from our member from Nepean—Carleton indicated that we are in full support of Bill 21—we will take it to committee and discuss it further there.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments.

Mr. Jonah Schein: I'm pleased to stand on behalf of constituents in Davenport and speak to Bill 21, the Employment Standards Amendment Act, but I would also just like to take a moment to welcome Grandma Grace for another season of the parliamentary channel. Grandma Grace tunes in regularly to this show. Grandma Grace, thank you. Welcome her to this afternoon's show.

Grandma Grace, this is proving to be not that exciting a season when it comes to content. We're here debating a bill that is important, but not ambitious. We do have some new characters on our show: Peggy Sattler, this year. Welcome Peggy Sattler to the House, a very exciting character on the show.

But we are speaking to employment standards, and the government has introduced a bill that will entitle employees to take care of somebody who is sick at home, which is a good thing and something that is worthy of support. It's not an ambitious program in any way, though. It doesn't provide any kind of financial support to people, and this is a government that, after 10 years, is spinning its wheels, quite frankly.

After 10 years, and almost two years of this particular government, it has not taken steps forward to actually protect families when it comes to income security. For someone to take eight weeks of leave to take care of a family member—for most people, it's just impossible if it is unpaid, because people I speak to in Davenport do not have that kind of money, they do not have that kind of resource and, quite frankly, they do not have that kind of job security, no matter how it's legislated. That's why we see the kinds of issues around unpaid internships right now, people who are working for free in this province. We have a government that has been here for years. We still have a frozen minimum wage in this province, and people can simply not pay the bills in Davenport if they make the minimum wage.

1640

If this government was serious about moving forward right now, they should be delivering a more ambitious agenda and doing the things that will actually protect families in my community of Davenport and right across the province.

And welcome, Peggy Sattler, to the Ontario legislative channel.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Nepean—Carleton has two minutes.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: It's a real pleasure to once again rise to respond to the comments. I would like to thank the member for Davenport, because you pointed out something that I think has been consistent among members of the official opposition as well, that we are really light on content this session, and we would like to see a more ambitious jobs creation strategy from this government. However, we do have a piece of legislation that is consistent with federal legislation, that is good for people across this province. Although there is no new money from this current government, it is important that we are consistent with the federal legislation that does support these folks.

I'd like to say thanks as well to his colleague from Algoma—Manitoulin. He's calling for more in this legislation, and I appreciate that. I always appreciate him bringing his passion to the floor of the assembly, and I thank him for that.

To the Minister of Rural Affairs, I thank you for your kind words about me. I will cherish them forever, because I'm sure they will be short-lived. But it was very kind of you to make the positive comments about my remarks, and I do appreciate it.

My colleague from Prince Edward—Hastings I think has brought a great deal of thought and substance and depth to the debates that he participates in, including this current debate. I thank him for his comments, and I look forward to obviously working more with him on this legislation.

But I must say, this is legislation that is not time-allocated. Therefore, we were able to, in my view, have the opportunity to have that great debate, which is, by the way, the reason we have this assembly: to have the great debate, be thoughtful on legislation, be critical when it is required, make amendments when necessary and pass strong legislation. And that really hasn't been happening—to the point of my colleague from Davenport—that often, so I encourage the government to bring [inaudible] to this assembly.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Further debate?

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: It's an honour always to rise on behalf of the people of Parkdale—High Park, the New Democratic Party and the people of Ontario, of course, too.

I want to start with a comment that was made by the member from Nepean—Carleton and kind of riff on that for a minute because, quite frankly, although we support this bill, Bill 21, for caregiver's leave—and I'll talk about

that in a minute—the fact that it has taken this long to get to this bill and the fact that there's really a lack of any kind of large vision across the aisle on the government side is a problem. It is a serious problem. This is a government that clearly has run out of ideas, clearly run out of any kind of vision to solve the substantive problems of our province, substantive problems like poverty. You heard the member from Davenport speak about that: the fact that our minimum wage has been stalled, that it's well below the poverty line now, that the government broke a promise to raise it to \$11 some time back, and by that condemned a whole raft of working people to live below the poverty line and yet work full-time. This is a reality, and those people cannot afford to take eight weeks of unpaid leave, which is a critical point to make about this bill—unpaid leave—to look after a sick or ailing relative. They simply cannot, so it's not doing them any favours.

Here is a government that has not raised the minimum wage, has talked about poverty but not really addressed it. Certainly for those families that are living long-term with a member of their family who has a severe disability—there are thousands of them on waiting lists for assistance from this government, thousands of them waiting with no light at the end of that tunnel at all. We've had instances of families, and we all have seen it, who have dropped their child off at a government office saying, "I can't do it anymore." This is the government that has not addressed that core problem. Those are people who are not living just for eight weeks with a member of their family who is suffering, but for lifetimes. In the last budget, I think about 14% of that waiting list were assisted—14%. That leaves thousands of families still struggling long-term with a member in that family who has a disability. That's long-term.

We see in this society a whole swath of workers—we saw an uprising in the United States, south of the border, of retail workers. Some of the wealthiest companies in the world—I don't have to mention them; we all know who they are—most of them American, some of them Canadian, who make billions of dollars and yet pay their workers minimum wage. Again, it's a minimum wage they can't live on. Those workers cannot afford to take eight weeks off.

We've seen a government that has directly attacked the labour movement with bills like Bill 115, attacked the collective bargaining process, when we all know, or should know, that unions, that organized labour, is one of the best ways of addressing poverty, that if you have a union to fight for you, to work for you, to speak for you, you have a better chance of making a living wage. Yet we saw this government directly attack collective bargaining in its process with Bill 115.

So we see the negatives; we don't see the positives. The positives that came out of this last budget were actually our ideas. The New Democratic Party put forward proposals which the government accepted. Those are really the only vision operative in this place right now.

Then we have these smaller bills. They're not bad. There's nothing wrong with them. There's nothing wrong with assuring people that they can't be fired if they take eight weeks off. Quite frankly—especially the small business employers I know—most employers already have compassionate leave programs in their work. Most good employers have already addressed that. Again, who will this really affect? How many will it really help? It's hard to say.

Speaking about business, small business produces about 90% of the new jobs in the province of Ontario, and yet there's not a lot of vision about small business. I was talking to some small business owners, small business associations, who said that many small businesses in the city of Toronto are now actually paying more in taxes than they are for rent for their businesses. There's no alleviation from this government for small business, no help for them, really, in terms of allowing them to hire folk. Again, any ideas on that front come from us, come from the New Democratic Party, with our leader, Andrea Horwath. That's where the fresh ideas are coming from. That's where the big picture ideas are coming from. And the government comes at us with a bill like this, which, again, is not bad, but it's pretty small fry.

We are dealing with substantial issues in the province of Ontario. I've said before that my parents' generation—most people here's parents' generation—could afford to buy a house and put a car in their driveway on one salary back then, and some particularly fortunate ones—maybe back then, but really, middle-class earners—could afford a cottage as well. Now in downtown Toronto, two salaries will barely get you the down payment for a house. Most people will never own their own home because they can't afford it. Most young people graduating from school will never get a job in their profession.

We have ministers across the aisle from the government side who stood up and crowed proudly that we spend less per capita on social services for our citizens than any other province. This is something they're proud of? This is something you should be ashamed of.

The government should be ashamed that we pay less per capita for our students to get an education than any other province. You should be ashamed of that. You should be ashamed that our students graduate from university with the highest debt load in the country—and the least chance of finding a job, by the way. What is a BA these days? What does that guarantee you except debt? That's the reality.

Yet at the same time, in the universities and colleges, the CEOs are doing very well—very well, thank you very much—because this government rejected another good idea that the NDP put forward, which was to limit those on the public purse salary to \$500,000 or less—\$500,000. Can't you live on \$500,000? Apparently not. If you're a CEO in a hospital or in a university, apparently that's not enough. Yet the students—you know, the people we should be speaking for—are suffering.

1650

Look at transit. Remember MoveOntario 2020? Remember Transit City? Wow, what happened to Transit

City? We were all in favour of Transit City. "Yes, let's go," we said. David Miller was mayor in Toronto. "Let's go. Let's build Transit City." You know what happened to Transit City? Kathleen Wynne was the transportation minister back there under Dalton McGuinty. She yanked about \$4 billion out of the purse under David Miller. Remember those subway ads with Dalton stabbing Transit City in the back? "Dalton McGuinty kills Transit City," and there was some truth to that when Kathleen Wynne was the transportation minister. Had that moved ahead on schedule, we wouldn't be in the pickle we're in now with a different sort of mayor with a different sort of agenda.

So again, you know, transit promises from this government 10 years later don't hold a lot of water, especially when they're done and made on such flimsy ground, without talking to partners. So again this is part of a broader vision, a broader vision we don't see. We see hit-and-miss promises, really, mostly aimed at gaining Liberal seats or gaining Liberal jobs for Liberal insiders. That seems to be the real focus of this government in the eight years I've been here: to gain Liberal insiders good jobs and to gain Liberal seats and maintain them. That seems to be the focus. Quite frankly, if there is a big vision, that's the big vision of the Liberal Party.

I get it. We all want to win. But at the end of the day, after 10 years in government, you might think there might be a bigger vision, a vision that actually has to do with making a better world for the people in Ontario, many of them who are suffering. You heard people talk about high hydro rates. Ah yes, that's just one of many issues facing the people in Ontario.

Things are not getting better for the average Ontarian—not in the last 10 years and not under this government—but things have maintained themselves pretty well for the Liberal Party of Ontario. That much is clear. So maybe that is the big vision of this government. If it is, it's a sad, sad vision, because we are facing some serious problems. They're not going to get better; they're going to get worse unless some real action is taken and some real platform and positions are put forward.

So yes, Bill 21, eight unpaid weeks of leave for those who could afford it for ailing relatives, absolutely. Why not? But, really, this is a very small step when we need to be running a marathon in this province.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments? The member for Mississauga—Streetsville.

Mr. Bob Delaney: Thank you very much, Speaker. Do you know what kind of vision is really important here? It's a vision shared with the Multiple Sclerosis Society, the Parkinson Society, the Alzheimer Society, the Canadian Cancer Society and the Caregiver Coalition. It's a vision that says, "Let's get on with this. Let's get this bill into committee. Let's see if there's any changes needed. Let's get it back into the Legislature, and let's get it adopted," instead of just going "blah blah blah" and talking about everything except what's in the bill. Let's get it to committee. Everyone supports it.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments? The member from Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I can assure the member for Mississauga—Streetsville that if and when this comes out of committee, you can rest assured that your government won't be attaching any dollars to it that were unattached to it before. You know, again it's fluff. The government is trying to portray itself as being compassionate, but the reality is that it doesn't matter who you are. If you said to someone, "You know, the Ontario government is bringing out legislation that is going to give you eight weeks of compassionate leave for various reasons, as indicated in the bill," you're going to say, "Oh, that's fantastic. You know, I could really use that, because you know how expensive it is to take time off." And then you say to them, "Oh, wait a minute. Wait a minute. You're not getting any money for this. You're just allowed to take the time off." They would ask themselves, "Well, what the hell do I need a bill for? Why did they need to bring this piece of legislation forward? Don't they realize that you can't wish to have food on the table; you actually have to go out and get it? You have to buy it. You have to be able to pay for it. You have to be able to pay your bills." There's no money attached to this.

When I travel through my riding—and you remember this bill pre-prorogation? It was such a priority for them that they prorogued the House, but we're not going to spend too much time—only 12 seconds left? Speaker, nobody has ever brought this bill up to me in my riding. They're worried about getting by in the Liberal Ontario and how difficult it is. That's the problem.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Mr. Michael Mantha: It's always a pleasure to be in the House when the member from Parkdale—High Park puts a different narrative on what these bills can actually do and the benefit it will bring, and when she actually talks about the social injustices that are out there and how this bill does little to address those needs for her constituents—and not just hers but, quite frankly, for constituents across the province. That's what we really need to do, Mr. Speaker, look at putting some meat behind the bones that we're trying to feed this province.

Again, I always enjoy listening to the member from Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke. He has such a way of being very assertive and very detailed in regard to his comments, but has a very pleasant way of bringing them across so that we can actually smile once in a while in this House. That is also something that we lack sometimes in this House; our work is very serious, but we sometimes forget to enjoy life just a little bit. I enjoy listening to the member. He always tends to put a smile on my face once in a while—once in a while. He often makes my head shake, too, but we won't go into those discussions today. But again—

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: You should hear him sing.

Mr. Michael Mantha: Pardon me? Oh. Apparently he's a good singer. Hopefully, next week at the plowing

matches we'll be able to hear some of that with his boots on.

The bill essentially is a challenge for a lot of individuals across this province. The member from Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke just hit it right on the head: Why would I put myself in a position where I'm going to have debt? It's so difficult making ends meet as we're going from day to day, paycheque to paycheque. How does an individual take that decision? It's a difficult one to take, especially when most of our households are relying on two incomes and you're asking to take one away. That's the tough part. If we're going to make these bills—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Thank you.

Mr. Michael Mantha: —we need to make them—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Thank you.

Mr. Michael Mantha: —in a way that is going to be beneficial to everybody.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): I'll remind the member from Algoma-Manitoulin that when I say "Thank you," you're done. Thank you.

Member from Brampton West.

Mr. Vic Dhillon: I'm very happy to rise to speak on Bill 21, which provides job-protected leave for families who are facing some very difficult circumstances.

One of the themes of our throne speech was to provide for a just and caring society and, among other things, other major elements of the throne speech, such as having a strong economy, having a strong health care and education system. This is a perfect fit to address our theme of having a just and fair society.

This past summer in Brampton West, a family that I know, their child went missing and is still missing. I can only imagine the sorrow, stress and pain that this family is going through. Like I said, we can only imagine; it's only the family that knows how hard it is to cope with such a thing. I was reminded of this last week when I found out that there was a wedding in the family. It's supposed to be a happy occasion for the whole family, and one can only imagine the sombre and the sad mood on this very auspicious occasion. Although we can only share in their grief—we can't do much—this bill goes very far in our understanding of people who go through these difficult situations. This bill is about compassion, and it's simply the right thing to do to make sure that working parents have peace of mind when they're going through some very difficult circumstances.

1700

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Parkdale-High Park has two minutes.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: Thanks to all who weighed in on this. Thank you for your comments.

Again, we're talking about a bill that gives eight weeks of unpaid leave to folk to look after a sick relative. I have to tell you, for the tens of thousands of folk who are waiting, languishing, on waiting lists to look after their relatives with disabilities—and only 14% of those concerns were addressed in the last budget by this government—to tell them that, "Hey, now you get another eight weeks of unpaid leave," many of whom have had to

leave their jobs, period, is not a blessing. It is not a blessing. It's a very small step addressing an issue that is huge and that will not be solved by this.

Most good employers have compassionate leave programs already. Again, most bad ones you'll never find out about because only 1% of employers ever see anybody from this government so that any employment standards are upheld. We have employers right now not even paying the folk who work for them, and yet somehow this is going to be enforced? I doubt it. Again, a very small step when we need so much. We, in fact, need a vision for how to govern the province of Ontario and those who are marginalized within it. What we get here is a sop. What we get here is more spin.

Quite frankly, 10 years later, it's just not enough. There's a message here: Stop relying on the New Democratic Party for all the good ideas. Start coming up with them yourselves. I know you have it in you, my friends in the government. I know you've got some good ideas. I know you have a vision out there for the Ontario we all want to live in. Why don't we see it? Why don't you give it? Put it forward. Meanwhile, of course, yes, let's pass this bill.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Further debate?

Mr. Rob E. Milligan: It's always a privilege to rise in the chamber here and take part in our democratic rights that we have and enjoy here in the province of Ontario.

Mr. Speaker, this Bill 21 that we're debating this afternoon actually has been debated here. We've had many a discussion. Many good points have been made. I would like to thank the member from Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke, my esteemed colleague, who always puts things in a quite robust and eloquent way. But he makes the point that, again—and I'm here almost two years, but one thing that I have noticed is the pattern that has been developed with this Liberal government. They're tired. They're weary. They're bringing forth legislation, quite frankly, Mr. Speaker, that is, as the member from Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke pointed out, fluff, window dressing—things that people back in my riding of Northumberland-Quinte West aren't talking about. As the member from Prince Edward-Hastings pointed out, they are not talking about it in the coffee shops.

When people are trying to struggle out there making ends meet—my esteemed colleague from Nepean-Carleton pointed out the sandwich generation. I myself, am a parent of two young daughters and with aging parents, who aren't at the point now where they're going to need attendants, but certainly in the near future I'm sure we're going to have that challenge ahead of us. We have to make sure, Mr. Speaker, that people are employed, first and foremost, in this province. This is something that this government has not focused on: an economic plan to get people working. Yes, this is a fluffy piece of legislation that actually brings forward ideas brought forward by our federal cousins. Mr. Harper, Mr. Flaherty and the Conservatives federally are trying to

bring forward some legislation. It's finally nice that the Liberals acknowledge that our federal cousins are doing a fantastic job. But again, this piece of legislation, Bill 21—I have some concerns, and I hope that when it does go to committee, there will be concerns that are amended or provisions that are made.

One of the things that I hear back home is, "My mom" or dad" has to go and have dialysis done two or three times a week, and I have to take time off work, without pay, and that's fine," or they have to get the neighbours to take their parent or loved ones to go for dialysis. Under this piece of legislation, Mr. Speaker—and I like to read the bills because I think it's extremely important that we look at the wording and what's actually being brought forward. So one of the first things I would like to touch on is, it says here, under subsection 5 of the family caregiver leave act, "An employee may take a leave under this section only in periods of entire weeks."

That's fine, but what happens when, again, as I hear more and more, people are taking a day or two, or three days to take their loved ones for dialysis? Does this mean that they have to take the entire week off? I'm sure they've already made arrangements with their employer, but again, as the member from Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke pointed out, why do we need a government to bring in regulations that make no sense? So that's just a point I would like to make about this legislation that I'm sure was an oversight or perhaps something that could be amended, but a week at a time is something I think that most employees would find, as pointed out, financially unsustainable.

Going on through Bill 21, we have the critically ill child care leave portion of it. One of the things that I would like, again, to point out that I have some difficulties with and would like to see changed is subsection 5 under this part: "Subject to subsections (6) and (7), an employee is entitled to take up to 37 weeks leave under this section to provide care or support for a critically ill child of the employee."

Well, we can have 52 weeks or 37 weeks. I don't know where the number 37 popped up. I mean, if I, as a father, was in a situation where my child was critically ill and my 37 weeks was up, I would have an issue. Now there is a provision in there, Mr. Speaker, before I go forward, that does say that an extension could be warranted, but these are inconveniences. Again, you have to provide written proof to your employer; your employer has to agree to the terms as set out etc. I can't begin to imagine the hardships, the emotions that a parent who has a terminally ill child is going through already, and yet here we have a government trying to regulate something on how parents can conduct themselves when it comes to employment.

The terms and definitions of "a week" are also troubling. A week, of course, as set out, is beginning Sunday, ending Saturday. That's standard; that's your typical definition for a week. However, in this bill, it points out that the leave required, upon death of that child, is terminated the week after. So if, for instance, the

child passes away on a Friday, and the week ends on a Saturday, that parent only has one day, under this bill, to prepare arrangements.

Mr. Speaker, I know everyone here has witnessed family, friends or neighbours who have gone through these types of hardships. It takes more than a day to prepare. I would like to think that we don't need legislation brought forward by any government to have compassion and human caring and dignity for those who are experiencing this type of traumatic event in their lives. I would like to think, and I still believe, that if I were an employer and one of my employees were going through a difficult time in their lives, my compassion for my fellow man and woman would allow me the dignity and the right to give my employee as much time as he or she required when it came to dealing with these events.

1710

Mr. Jonah Schein: No regulation needed?

Mr. Rob E. Milligan: No regulations when it comes to that.

Interjection.

Mr. Rob E. Milligan: No.

As my esteemed colleague from Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke pointed out, again—he's so wise, Mr. Speaker. Sometimes when we're in caucus, I just sit there in awe of his brilliance and insight. Perhaps it's the years of being here in the chamber. But again, there are no monies attached to this bill. This government can go forward all they want and say, "Look at how wonderful this bill is, this regulation that allows you to take time off work," but we're not going to pay you one red cent.

I think that this is a major flaw in the legislation, but as pointed out by my colleagues, it's a bill that we're willing to support. It's a bill that, I think, has some merit but, again, looking at the wording, there are some sections in this bill that I would like to see amended and ratified. My recommendations will be coming forthwith with regard to that when Bill 21 does indeed get to committee.

Thank you very much for your time this afternoon, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I've got to say that I kind of agree with what was being said here by the member. I'm not sure to what degree we have the resolve to deal with this in the same way. What's clear is that there is a real issue here. In our society, more and more people are living longer and longer, and it's becoming much more complex to care for people as they get older. Hence, at the same time, we have a problem: We're taxing—and I don't mean taxing as in money—our health care system in the sense that our health care system is having a bit of a struggle to deal with making sure that people are able to be cared for.

It just seems to me, as an Ontarian and as a legislator, that if we can find a way in order to engage family members to be able to help care for those people who are sick and need help, that is a savings to the system. That is

a savings. We don't have to put people in long-term-care institutions, hospitals or complex care of some type in order to be able to deal with those people's infirmities, malady or whatever it might be.

The problem with this bill is that it speaks to the need to do that, but it doesn't do a lot when it comes to figuring out how people can afford to do this. This is really the tough part. It seems to me that, at one point, we have to decide as a society how family members can play a larger role in the care of loved ones and those that we care for within the community and within our own homes. It seems to me that if people decide to do that—maybe by way of tax rebate, maybe by way of some sort of stipend, or maybe by some other means that I haven't thought of—we can find a way to actually allow people to do this where they're not going to be completely out of pocket when it comes to being able to pay their own bills.

The frank reality is that we all work hard and harder to pay the same amount of bills that cost far more money these days, and it's difficult to make ends meet. Having to quit your job or work fewer hours to care for a loved one can become rather difficult, and I'll speak to that in my comments later.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Mrs. Laura Albanese: I just wanted to point out that this legislation—the speaker before me said that it was window dressing and fluffy, but when you have a need within your family, whether your child is missing or your elderly parent has gone missing, it's not fluffy and it's not window dressing.

This legislation is addressing a gap in the current leaves of absence under the Employment Standards Act, because the ESA, right now, doesn't currently provide for a long-term unpaid job-protected leave for employees that want to care for a family member with a serious medical condition where there's no risk of imminent death—no risk of imminent death. There are other leaves that address that. This is really a question of addressing a gap that exists right now.

The member lauded the federal government, and I know that they recently passed the Helping Families in Need Act that introduced new employment insurance and special benefits for parents of critically ill children. These benefits will provide support for up to 35 weeks to eligible parents caring for a critically ill child under 18. The federal government also made amendments to the Canada Labour Code to allow for a corresponding unpaid job-protected leave for employees in the federal jurisdiction, such as banks, airlines and telecommunications. The ESA currently does not offer an unpaid job-protected leave that matches the specific terms of the new federal leave and the EI benefits income support. So this is addressing a gap for people that may find themselves in these critical situations, and that's needed.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Mr. Jim McDonell: It's a privilege to stand up and comment on my colleague from Northumberland—Quinte

West and his very astute comments about this bill, and to talk about some of the issues of it. We're glad—this was the second run at this bill; it was lost during prorogation—that the government did listen to some of our comments on it and made some of the changes that we were looking for. But there is no money attached to this. It is a bill that actually, in a lot of ways, saves the government money.

Unfortunately, I guess, too many of us know people who this bill would be a help to. Recently, somebody that I knew, a friend of ours, lost somebody after a long bout of cancer, a young child. It's protection that I think is warranted. I think it has the support right across this House. Saying that, it is something that I think we're looking forward to see go through. It has a lot of merit. The member from Timmins—James Bay reaffirmed some of the issues that he's seen on this bill. We're looking forward to seeing this coming through.

It doesn't provide much—or any—financial help to these families. We see generally they're in need. They need to put—the person I knew—just food on the table. The community came together and helped out, but there's only so much the community could do. We have to sometimes turn back to the government to look at help. This person stayed at home to look after her daughter so that she could stay at home and not have to stay in the hospital. Certainly, very tough times for them. When you add the issues that go along with that, which are trying to stay in the house, pay the rent, pay the utilities, it makes it very difficult. Certainly this legislation is well warranted, and we're looking forward to it.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Mr. Jonah Schein: I'm speaking again to Bill 21, the Employment Standards Amendment Act. Speaker, we've heard several members of the House this afternoon comment on this bill, a bill that does provide employees with up to eight weeks of leave to take care of somebody who is sick or in crisis. Obviously, that's a principle that we all support. How we go about doing that varies. My colleague to the right over here was saying that it should just be in the interest of the individual to make that decision. We do hope that people will act in a responsible manner individually. But we're here as legislators, I think, to actually legislate a framework that will make sure that people behave in a responsible way and make sure that employees in times of need are supported when their families are in critical situations.

Speaker, the level of conversation, the level of debate in here, I don't think actually matches the reality on the streets. Certainly in Davenport when you knock on doors, people are in very desperate situations. If a family member is ill, or if they have a disability, the whole family is in crisis, and it warrants a real response. It's not just a personal response. People are always willing to go and make a personal sacrifice for a family member, but families in Davenport and across Ontario need the support of the provincial government of Ontario to step in and protect them and support them.

1720

We can, as legislators, do the things that will protect families, and it is a shame that days go by, hours spin by and years go by and yet people who are sick in this province, people with disabilities, are not being supported. The fact that people who are disabled are doomed to a life of poverty in the province of Ontario is a shame, and it's a responsibility that we all own as legislators here that that goes on and that exists.

There is so much that needs to be done here. An eight-week unpaid leave for a family member might help some folks, but for most folks that is just not enough.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Northumberland–Quinte West has two minutes.

Mr. Rob E. Milligan: I want to thank the members from Timmins–James Bay, York South–Weston, Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry and Davenport for their comments.

I would agree with the member from Davenport that there has to be some kind of framework perhaps in place, but I think, again, this Liberal government overregulates. There are over 385,000 regulations on the books right now, and that's hindering our growth economically here in the province of Ontario, when you talk to small businesses throughout the riding etc. When it comes to family, particularly, I think obviously there are things within this bill that are very good. There are accomplishments that can be made moving forward with this bill.

One of the things I would like to point out, that the member from Davenport would like to see framework-wise, is that this bill currently only looks at missing children, and a child by definition is the age of 18. Well, perhaps there should be an age increase because there are a lot of students in colleges and universities that go missing, that are abducted or whatever. So if the member from Davenport wants to bring in some kind of framework regarding that, I would recommend that the member from Davenport look at that because if my 21-year-old daughter goes missing, I would like to think that the courtesies of this bill would also include that.

When it comes to the financing of this, or lack thereof, I think, again, pointing to the member from Renfrew, he has banged it right on the head, and I want to congratulate him for that.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Further debate?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate having a few minutes to speak to this particular bill. I want to expand on what it is that I had said in the previous two-minute response to the Conservative member who just spoke on this particular issue.

It seems to me that where we're at in Ontario—as across most jurisdictions who operate in the public health care system—is a bit of a crossroads. Well, I wouldn't say crossroads; that wouldn't be fair. We're at a bit of a decision point when it comes to, how do we deal with an aging population that's living longer and longer because we're living healthier and healthier lifestyles and our

medical system is better able to treat disease so that people actually live longer?

If you look at 40 or 50 years ago, the morbidity rate, when it came to the age at which people died, was much sooner than it is today. We look today and it's not uncommon to see men and women live into their late 80s, early 90s and in some cases into their 100s. I was reading an article the other day where unfortunately a gentleman got involved in an altercation with the police at 107 years old. I only wish I have that problem. I don't think it was unfortunately a good outcome and I won't speak to it, but my point is that we are living longer. It's a healthier lifestyle. We're just a lot better at treating disease, and diseases that used to kill people but 20 years ago we're able to cure or at least manage, and people live longer.

That causes a lot of hope for people, as far as their ability to continue a long life, but also creates some challenges in our public health care system. It just seems to me that at one point we've got to get our heads around this issue. Now the government says they want to pass this particular bill because it's going to put it in line with what the federal regulations and laws are when it comes to being able to take family leave and not be penalized by your employer. I think that's a good thing. That's why I and New Democrats will vote in favour of this bill. But does it respond entirely to the problem? I don't think it responds to it as much as as it needs to, and let me explain.

In our constituency offices or in our families, we all see people who are challenged to be able to provide health care services to their family members or loved ones—and it's not that the public system is not able to deal with that. It deals with it in a fairly good way, compared to other jurisdictions, I would argue, like the United States, where they don't have a public health care system. But there are challenges. For example, there are many members of families who say, "Listen, if I can stay at home and care for my aging mother," or father or in some cases a sibling, whoever it might be, they would choose to do that rather than have that family member or friend have to be in an institution. The problem is, they can't afford to do that, because the reality is that we're all struggling to make ends meet. Nowadays, people are really having difficulty to pay their hydro bills, to pay the groceries, to pay the car payment and gas for the car, and rent for the house or the mortgage or the taxes.

I have a friend who I've known for years and years, who's a neighbour close to where I live, who unfortunately became disabled as a result of an accident he had in mining and doesn't qualify for workers' compensation. All he gets is CPP. It's a bit of a complicated story, but he is forced to sell his house that's free and clear as a way of getting cash so that he can continue to buy groceries and pay the basic bills for him and his wife. So they're selling their house of many years and taking the equity from that house and moving into something a lot smaller to find a way to make ends meet.

My point is, families are struggling; people are struggling. We're having a hard time trying to make ends meet.

At the other end, we're struggling, as a province, to figure out how to pay for a health care system that's becoming more complex, that's becoming much more efficient, that's making people live longer and costing a heck of a lot more money. When I first came to this Legislature, the expenditure of the Ontario Legislature was about \$50 billion, of which a little bit more than half was on health care: about \$30 billion. Our budget last year was some 120-billion-odd dollars, of which over half is health care. The dollar only goes so far.

It seems to me we have an opportunity here to engage families and members of our society who wish to do so to be able to help care for people who otherwise would end up in institutions but could stay at home if somebody was able to care for them. Sometimes it could be as simple as, maybe a family member is able to arrange their schedule at work to be able to go in and check in on their loved one or their friend or their neighbour on a regular basis, to make sure that they take their medication or get a bath or whatever it might be. Yes, the CCAC system is there to have that happen, but some family members would rather do it themselves.

I have a sister who's schizophrenic: Louise, who is now 60 years old—luckily for us, Louise is doing quite well—and complicated by her having terminal cancer that has gone into her bone. She is probably going to be around for a long time yet, but at one point, we as a family may want to do this ourselves.

But how can you afford to do it if you can't take the time off from work to care for that family member? So it seems to me that one of the issues we should be thinking about is, how are we able to compensate those people who choose to do that for legitimate reasons. I don't mean, "This is a great way to make a paycheque and not do anything," but actually be engaged in the care of a family member or others. Is there a way to provide some form of compensation or some kind of accommodation to be able to do it? We do it, for example, for kids. There are foster parents who care for children, and we have a per diem allowance that we give these families in order to care for children. That, rightfully so, is a good way of dealing with this, because otherwise, we'd have to pay full-time staff to care for these kids inside group homes, and that's not the way to raise a child. A child should have a family and be nurtured and be within a home structure.

Is there something similar that we can think about and do and challenge ourselves, as legislators, to be able to deal with it, so that our family members or friends are better able to take care of those who are in need rather than taxing our health care system? Sure, you'd still be able to utilize the services of a CCAC, community care access centre, or whatever it might be, in order to provide the medical and physical needs that person has, to a degree. But if the person is able to stay at home and have the kind of supervision and care that a family member can give and not have to go into an institution, think of how much money we save. Putting somebody in a long-term-care institution—I think our provincial per diem is

up to about \$140 a day in a municipal home for the aged, plus what the family has to pay for the person to be there, plus the municipal portion. So we're spending probably \$180 to \$200 a day of taxpayers' money to maintain somebody in a long-term-care facility. If we do that in a hospital, the cost could be \$700 to \$1,000 a day, depending what unit they're in. Maybe there are ways that we can say, listen, rather than spend 200 bucks and put the person in a long-term-care institution, the person is able to live in their home; maybe you build a granny flat or maybe you move them into your home, if that's what you choose to do, and we offset the cost to the family by freeing up some of the money that would normally go to building long-term-care beds or keeping them in a hospital, as a way to be able to reuse the same money—not invent a new pot of money, but reuse the same money so that the person is able to live at home.

1730

This is just something that I've been thinking about for a while, and it's out of necessity, because as I look at people in my constituency, more and more they're facing these challenges. It just seems to me that, at one point, it would be interesting to hear people come before this committee, when this bill finally goes to committee. By the way, let me make a point here: That's why we have committees. Why did New Democrats not allow the government to truncate the process on the tanning bill from second to third reading? The public has the right to know. The public has a right to be able to comment on legislation. This is the people's Legislature. This is the people's government and the people's opposition. People have the right to come to committee.

Now it looks like that's going to happen, because we moved motions that I hope by now have passed or are about to be passed in order to make that happen, but that's why this bill has to go to committee as well, to have the public come and challenge us as legislators and ministers and bureaucrats and others, to say, "Maybe there's another way of looking at this. Maybe there's a way of finding savings in the system by not having people in institutions and utilizing that money to help those people who are trying to get leave to be able to care for a loved one at home," or to find some other form of accommodation that maybe none of us have thought about, but somebody else may have a better idea.

I look forward to this bill going to committee, and I truly hope that we can start thinking about how we go to the next step. This is a good first step. We'll vote for this because it's a step in the right direction, but I think it would be very useful for us to think about how we get to that next step so that we can engage families and others in caring for the people we care for and love and want to see live in an independent setting and not have to have them in institutions prematurely.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Ms. Mitzie Jacquelín Hunter: This bill is about care and compassion. The bill, if passed, would recognize the importance of family and job security by creating unpaid job-protected leave for hard-working Ontarians.

I know in Scarborough–Guildwood, whether it is to provide care and support to family members with a serious medical condition or care for a critically ill child or just to take some time to deal with the death or disappearance of one's child as a probable result of a crime—when someone needs a leave, it's no time for us to be wondering whether or not we have it. It's important that we all have that standard in place so that we can make plans and care for our loved ones. That consistency and predictability is also important to employers, who will also be able to plan.

What's important here is that there is flexibility and that there is choice for people, so that they have the option to take this time to spend it where their priorities are deemed, which is with their family and with their loved ones. With this protection, they won't be worrying about their jobs. Rather, their efforts will be made in ensuring that their loved ones are cared for.

From the discussions we've had, it's clear that this bill makes sense and we should ensure that this bill gets into committee as soon as possible, where it can be further refined and we can make some of those revisions that we have discussed to ensure that we have those standards in place that are fair for everyone and that are consistent and clear.

People do not take leaves unless they need them, and if they need those leaves, they should be in place so that they can have the choice to care for their family and their loved ones.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: I'd like to comment on the member from—

Mr. John O'Toole: Timmins–James Bay.

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: —Timmins–James Bay; I'm sorry.

I want to tell you about a few experiences I've had in the past with injuries. When I was a teenager, I got caught in the power takeoff of a tractor; I was on crutches for a number of weeks or months. Fortunately, I had my family at home to look after me, and that's the way we did things back then.

I spoke to the Legislature about my brother-in-law passing away in February from ALS. His wife—my sister—was able to stay home with him. Financially they were all right, and they could do this type of thing. Then my mother went and broke her leg in November and spent three months in the hospital over that. Fortunately, they are retired, and—

Interjection.

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: Yes, don't be around me.

Anyways, fortunately they are retired and well off, and my father was able to care for her. But I heard a statistic on the radio this morning that was rather shocking. I think the figure is 46% of those working right now could not afford to lose one paycheque before they would have financial problems. That's scary. One paycheque, and they can't pay their bills. As we've seen with escalating hydro costs, gasoline costs and things like that, it's going

to be difficult for people to take advantage of this bill. That's the flaw that I see in this bill. I think that has to be addressed in committee before this bill comes back for third reading. I really don't think that people are going to take advantage, no matter what we say in this bill, because of the financial situations a lot of families face in Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments.

Mr. Jonah Schein: Again, speaking to Bill 21, the Employment Standards Amendment Act, it's interesting to hear the comments of my colleagues from the Conservative Party speaking quite accurately about the lack of financial support provided in this bill. When this bill goes to committee—

Interjection.

Mr. Jonah Schein: No, I'm agreeing with you. I think that this bill does far too little to support families in crisis, but I would like to see the Conservatives step up and actually put some money on the table to support families in need. It's one thing to talk about it in here, but at the same time, your cousins in the federal party are cutting employment insurance benefits, or freezing them. Speaking across the aisle here, the government is saying that this is a bill that will help. This is a bill that, at best, does no harm, but it does very little to help anyone.

My colleague from Timmins–James Bay puts this, actually, in the kind of contextual light that it deserves: This is a health care issue. This is a province that spends most of its budget on health care issues, and if we actually did things in a different way, we would be able to support people in a real way. The bill before us does nothing but pretty much keep the status quo in place. If you're well off in this province, you can afford to stay home and take care of your family, but if you're not well off, you're not going to be able to do that. This bill just does not substantially address the real situation of people in this province.

Just before coming to House duty today, I had a meeting with stakeholders. These are people who would never be supported by this, people who are deemed as independent contractors, but they are employees; they just don't have any rights at work. They're bike couriers, they're bike messengers. They're on the streets every day, delivering and making this city function, and yet they don't have any benefits at all. They don't get any sick days. If they have a family member in crisis, they're not going to get paid that day, and that reflects the reality of probably 50% of people in the GTA. This bill will do nothing to help those members. It will do something to help very few people here, and it's worth supporting for that alone.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: It's a pleasure to join the debate. I'm starting to hear the same thing over and over again: that most members, if not all members, in this House support this bill. However, they need to express their opinions on what's wrong and what's right, what

they'd like to see in it. That, generally, is the role of the committee, without taking away the right of anybody to speak in this House.

We've all said that this bill is going to do a lot of good for people. Some people say it's not going to do a whole lot of good, but I don't think that anybody has said that this bill is bad for anybody. It's something we can do for the people of Ontario that's going to make their lives better. The sooner we're able to do that, the sooner those lives will get better. The sooner we are able to bring our legislation into line with the federal legislation—with the new federal leave, and the employment insurance benefits and income supports that are being introduced by the federal government—as soon as we bring the Employment Standards Act into line with that, more people will be able to avail themselves of those benefits.

That, to me, is a positive. It's a step forward. I hope we can move to the committee very, very shortly.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Timmins—James Bay has two minutes.

1740

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I want to thank all members for their comments. I've got to say, in regard to the last comments I just heard, like, "Hurry up, get it to committee because"—excuse me. This is the Legislature, and all members of this House have a responsibility to be able to, as best they can, represent the view of their constituencies or others they would have met with in regard to a bill. I hadn't had a chance to speak on this bill, because of the way the schedule works in this House, and there was 10 minutes afforded to me in order to put something on the record that I don't think anybody else talked about. I was trying to be thoughtful in regard to how maybe, once we get to committee, one of the things that we could look at is, how do we find a way to move money within the system to assist those people who are currently or want to in the future care for people within their own home or somebody else's home? I hear the government get up and say, "Let's get it to committee." Well, excuse me, it's the Legislature. This is not a sausage factory where we're going to throw legislation out as quickly as we can without any thought. There's a process, and the process is to raise issues in this House that we think are important.

Now, I think this thing is pretty close to ending; I think we're on day 3 or day 4. I don't think it's unreasonable to believe that a bill should be in the House for three or four or five days. What the heck is wrong with that? People have lived without this provision for how many years? Certainly to God—

Interjection.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: —and the government prorogued last year. There's nothing here, no attempt to try to slow down or to filibuster. All we're doing is making suggestions on how we can make the bill better. I presume this bill is not going to be here much longer, but I resent the fact that members would stand and chastise members for debating this bill and bringing new ideas to what is, I think, a very weak bill.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Further debate?

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: I'm pleased to rise to speak to Bill 21, An Act to amend the Employment Standards Act, 2000 in respect of family caregiver, critically ill child care and crime-related child death or disappearance leaves of absence. That's the title of the bill. It is one of these unique situations we're debating in this Legislature where the debate has actually worked the way it was supposed to. This bill was first introduced as Bill 30, the Family Caregiver Leave Act, and at that point there were a number of problems with the bill. During second reading, members got up and pointed out those problems and talked about ways to improve it—and, for once, the government listened. Last October, Bill 30, like many other good bills, died when the Legislature prorogued, but instead of reintroducing the same bill, the government took the time to make some improvements and introduced one that was better. I want to recognize them for that. It's something we wish had happened on a number of other bills.

After the Legislature prorogued, I had to reintroduce my private member's bill, the Hawkins Gignac Act, which would require carbon monoxide detectors in all Ontario homes. This is a bill that has unanimously passed second reading twice and committee once. Last spring, the Premier announced that her government would be supporting mandatory carbon monoxide detectors in homes. So just before the end of the session, I wrote to the House leaders and to the Premier to tell them that I would be asking for unanimous consent to have second and third reading to get this life-saving legislation passed. I was surprised and disheartened when the Premier and the government House leader were among those who said no. That doesn't seem like working together to get things done.

Mr. Speaker, there were many other bills like the Family Caregiver Leave Act and the Hawkins Gignac Act that died when this Legislature prorogued. One other example is the Local Food Act. When it was introduced last October, we heard from agricultural groups, farmers and local food groups who were greatly disappointed. A food act is an opportunity to do something significant that will impact our food system from field to fork, and this government missed that opportunity. However, unlike Bill 30, in the case of the Local Food Act the government chose not to listen to the concerns that the opposition had raised and introduced virtually exactly the same bill again.

People send all of us here to make a difference, not to talk to the cameras but to debate the merits of legislation and point out where it misses the mark. I'm disappointed by the recent comments made by the government House leader criticizing members for not doing exactly what it is we were sent here to do. The majority of the delay for the Local Food Act was not caused by second reading debate, which only took 20 hours over five weeks, a debate which included a number of ideas and initiatives that I think would have greatly strengthened the bill. The

delay was caused by proroguing the Legislature and the fact that the social policy committee was not allowed to sit over the summer. As a result, the committee is still working on the report on diluted chemotherapy drugs so we can ensure that no one else in Ontario has to suffer through that situation. That report that our committee is working on is a reminder that the work we do here has a significant impact on the lives of Ontarians. It means that we shouldn't be rushing bills through without taking the time to examine them thoroughly. It also means that we should, as happened with this bill, listen to all the concerns raised in the Legislature and, where possible, amend the bill to address them.

I think that together we've made this bill better. This bill now closes the inconsistency between the Canada Labour Code and the Ontario Employment Standards Act.

There are a few concerns still remaining in the bill, which I'll speak to in a minute. First I want to talk about the goal of this bill: ensuring that people can be there for critically ill family members or that parents have time to mourn the loss of a child. It would also allow an employee to take up to eight weeks to care for a spouse, a parent, a child or a number of other close relatives. I've heard from constituents who have lost their jobs as a result of needing to take a long leave, something this bill would have prevented.

I was talking recently to one of my staff who took some time when her mother was critically ill. She said it was one of the greatest gifts she could have been given: that when her mother passed away, she never had to feel like she hadn't been there for her mother, and she has never had to feel like she had missed out on time together in that last year. I think there are many people like my staff who are already taking family leaves when required or working out arrangements that work for them.

I have a concern that this bill may be too restrictive in two places, first in defining a week as being from Sunday to Saturday. In most offices, that may be the way they schedule, but I'm not sure that all businesses run on that schedule. For instance, some restaurants do the scheduling from midweek to midweek. While I understand that this clause is to make it easier for employers to keep the job open by allowing them to manage staffing, in some cases it may have the opposite effect. By making that definition a little more open, I think it would make it easier for everyone.

Likewise the clause requiring the employees to take full weeks: For some people and companies that might be easier, but for others, it might make more sense for the employee and the company to agree that it will be a partial leave for a few days a week. For instance, that might allow siblings to share caring for a parent.

All of these situations described in the bill are a difficult time in people's lives. Some are among the most horrific that any of us could imagine. Giving people and employers the flexibility to handle the leave in a way that suits them best is probably the kindest thing that we can do for them.

For my staff member who took time, she was allowed to go as needed on the days that her mother was most ill or needed assistance. As a result, she was also able to keep doing her job until about a week and a half before her mother passed away while still being there for her mother.

If we are too restrictive, we may actually end some of the more flexible arrangements that employers are currently offering. I think we all agree that giving people the option for leave when a family member is critically ill is the right thing to do.

I think we would also all agree that no two situations are the same and that, for many people, taking leave is not an easy decision. They need to work out whether they can afford the financial costs. People struggle with when to take it. How do you know how long your family member has left? While some may want to take it earlier to help with treatments or to be there as the loved one goes through chemo, it's hard to know what is coming next and whether the leave would be needed more in the future.

These are all tough decisions, Mr. Speaker, decisions that people need to deal with. Having this act will make it a little easier on those people. I think that looking at those two items to create a little more flexibility will help make it a little easier, too.

Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to have the opportunity to speak to this. It's much better than the version we had before. I'm often disappointed by the fact that government makes long speeches about wanting to work with the opposition and then ignores our input, and in fact complains when we take time to put forward suggestions. It's nice to see that, for once, they have taken our suggestion and created a bill that will be stronger and work better for the people of Ontario, and I hope that this won't be the only time they do so. I hope that instead of complaining to the media, they will look seriously at the suggestions that we've put forward on the Local Food Act, such as including a requirement for food education in the curriculum for all grades and creating a tax credit for farmers who donate produce to food banks. It's not enough to say you want to work together; you have to demonstrate it. The government has done in this bill, but there are too many cases where the opposite is true.

1750

Mr. Speaker, I want to say that I had the opportunity—not because this bill was in place, but when my mother passed away, as a staff member I had that opportunity. I come from a large family. She didn't want to go to the hospital and we sat with her for about four months, 24 hours a day, everybody sharing it; and those were the most important days of our lives that all of us could share with my mother at that time. I think this will provide that opportunity for people who are not self-employed and who cannot take that time off at their leisure.

I very much support this bill, but I think much more needs to be done to make sure that it works for all the people, not regimented so one size has to fit all.

Thank you again for the opportunity to speak to this bill, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments.

Mr. Michael Mantha: The comments that I'm making now are comments that I made when this bill was Bill 30, An Act to amend the Employment Standards Act, 2000 in respect of family caregiver leave, and I thought it was important for me to bring them up again.

The definitions of "family member" are indicated here, 1 through 8, and particularly number 8 is the one that I want to highlight right now: "Any individual prescribed as a family member for the purpose of this section." I'm not sure if that determination refers to the above 7, but I want to talk to you about a neighbour I have.

Her name is Georgine Boucher. She's a fabulous neighbour; she's a great lady. She's getting up there in age—and I hope she's not listening to the program today, because I'm going to get an earful when I get home this weekend. But she is a wonderful woman. Fortunately, as neighbours, my wife and I, if anything was to happen to her, would be in a position to help her out. I'm really glad that we're going to be able to do that for her. But in certain instances across northern Ontario, those family members just aren't close. Those family members are your neighbours down the street. That family member is someone who is just, lo and behold, a quarter mile down the road. We would often like to take care of the individuals that we have in our community, but these definitions don't include those individuals, so it's of concern to me.

The other concern I have is "a copy of the certificate." As hard as it is for an individual to take this time off, you're going to have to get the certificate, and guess what? You're going to have to pay a doctor for the certificate, creating further hardship.

Those are the concerns that I have and I thought it was important for me to raise them again, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments.

Mr. Bill Mauro: I'm glad to have a couple minutes on this issue. I want to congratulate our Minister of Labour for bringing this forward, Bill 21, the Employment Standards Amendment Act (Leaves to Help Families), 2013. The reason that I want to congratulate him—specifically the part of the legislation that I really like and I would assume others in the Legislature also really like—is the job-protected component of this for caregivers.

Now, the categories—I'm assuming most of them have been raised here—are a spouse, parent, stepparent, foster parent of the employee or the employee's spouse; child, stepchild, foster child of the employee or the employee's spouse; grandparents, step-grandparent, grandchild or step-grandchild of the employee or the employee's spouse; the spouse of a child of the employee; the employee's brother or sister; and a relative of the employee who is dependent on the employee for care or assistance. So it's pretty broad in its application—job-protected leave.

I wanted to mention the job-protected piece in a second—I want to underscore that a little bit—but just to mention as well some of the groups that are very supportive of this. The MS Society, the Parkinson Society, the Alzheimer Society, the Canadian Cancer Society and the caregiver coalition are all on side in terms of supporting this legislation.

The job-protected piece reminds me of back in 2002, when I was asked to run provincially. I remember that my employer of the day basically was telling me, "Well, Billy, if you go, you're gone. There's nothing we can do for you." I said, "No, I don't think that's the case. The legislation says this." In any event, I remember having to get a lawyer to get a letter. It cost me 3,000 or 5,000 bucks to try to tell my employer, "No, you have to protect my job for a little while." As it turns out, I think it ended up being five years. But it was a risk for me.

I'm not comparing my circumstance to the seriousness of this issue, but I am simply underscoring the fact that job-protected leave for people who find themselves in difficult health care situations is real, it's relevant and it's consequential for the people we represent.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments? The member from Oxford.

Mr. John O'Toole: Durham.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Actually, what happened was the two of you stood up, so I was confused.

The member from Durham.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: That would be enough to confuse me, Speaker, looking at the two of them.

Mr. John O'Toole: We look a lot alike, I suppose.

Interjection.

Mr. John O'Toole: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to take one or two minutes of time here.

I do want to comment on the member from Oxford, when he personalized it by talking about his family and his mother in the last stage of palliative care, I suppose. I think for everyone here, whether they're in the House or listening or even, for that matter, at the table, that's an important component of it.

As well, the member from Algoma-Manitoulin personalized it by talking about the neighbour and how it would work there and how he and his wife would certainly step in.

Generally, I think we all agree on the sentiment of it. In fact, yesterday the member from Timiskaming-Cochrane said that it was a feel-good bill. So we generally agree on the intent, the sentiment of it all. The disagreement is really on a completely other side.

It's important to note that the people most vulnerable probably couldn't take a day off without pay. In fact, now I'm working with a lady in my riding who has been called for jury duty, who can't afford to take a day off work.

They're living hand to mouth in Ontario today, with many of these jobs. In the case of the individual who wants to take care of, with all the best of intentions—they're not able to because of the high cost of electricity

and other impinging expenses: the cost of gas etc. today in Ontario.

We agree with the sentiment, we agree with the bill, and it should probably go to committee. But really, even small employers, a mom-and-dad shop, a Mac's—if they're to give the employee—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Thank you. Questions and comments?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I think the debate is showing that, in fact, there's some thought being put to how we're able to better this bill. I think that's a good sign that legislators are taking this seriously and trying to grapple with how to deal with the complexity of providing health care to people in today's environment.

We all know that it's costing more and more money to run our health care system because people are living longer. We're really getting a lot better at how we care for people, and that's really expensive. If you take a look, people from 20 or 30 years ago were dying of diseases that today you can treat and, in some cases, cure. Obviously, our health care needs are changing over time.

As I said earlier in my discussions on this debate, we should be thinking about how to find ways to allow people to live independently at home longer. The first stab at that was to create—and it was created under our government, under the NDP government—a system of long-term care that was able to bring services into the community. There was a hodgepodge of different agencies that were out there, and our government tried to redirect long-term care in such a way that we had some form of dispatching and some form of organizing health care so that it was a little bit easier for people to get those services in the home. Each government since then, the Conservatives and the Liberals, has tried to improve on that and has done some improvements on how to get services in the community. But what we missed along the way and I think what we're starting to realize is we need to find a way to engage family members and others, if they so choose, to be part of the caregiving circle that allows people to live at home independently. In some cases, it might mean a leave from employment for a short period of time or in a part-time kind of way, or maybe a permanent thing. I think it's one of the options we need to look at—and how we fund that, which is a weakness of this bill, as I think the question we have to ask ourselves is, how can we do that?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Oxford has two minutes.

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: I'd like to thank the members from Algoma-Manitoulin, Thunder Bay-Atikokan, Durham and Timmins-James Bay for their comments.

I also want to point out to the member from Thunder Bay-Atikokan that obviously the only purpose of this bill is what he says he likes about this bill, and I agree with him: the job protection. Obviously, without this bill, everybody can take as much leave time off as they like, except that they aren't guaranteed to have their job. This bill will make sure they can do that to keep their job, and taking that leave.

That also brings me to the point that I think it becomes important that we need to look at the bill as the definition—he went through it—about who was eligible, under the act, as a family member. I think it's important. One place that I think that needs to be looked at is that anyone who has been working for an employer for six months or more—now, what happens if I just changed jobs or somebody has just changed jobs? After 25 years in one job, they got laid off and they found another one, and five months later they have to take leave, and then this bill says it doesn't apply—why should it be any different for someone depending on the length of time? I can see that it would not necessarily apply for part-time workers, but I think there needs to be a better description of making sure that we don't work on trying to eliminate people who would not qualify, and make it as broad as we can to make sure everybody is getting the same protection.

I think it's also important to look at some of the length of time. I think that was spoken to in some of the other comments, the length of time that's available and how you can utilize that time eight weeks per year. It seems to me that if you could take 16 half-weeks, you could likely do a lot more good for that same individual. Incidentally, I've been an employer who has given that time off. It's also easier to replace an employee for a longer period of time. So I think that the bill needs to look at that in committee. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): It being past 6 o'clock, this House stands adjourned until 9 o'clock tomorrow morning.

The House adjourned at 1802.

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Fraser, John (LIB) Gélinas, France (NDP)		

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Leone, Rob (PC)	Cambridge	
Levac, Hon. / L'hon. Dave (LIB)	Brant	Speaker / Président de l'Assemblée législative
MacCharles, Hon. / L'hon. Tracy (LIB)	Pickering-Scarborough East / Pickering-Scarborough-Est	Minister of Consumer Services / Ministre des Services aux consommateurs
MacLaren, Jack (PC) MacLeod, Lisa (PC) Mangat, Amrit (LIB)	Carleton-Mississippi Mills Nepean-Carleton Mississauga-Brampton South / Mississauga-Brampton-Sud	
Mantha, Michael (NDP) Marchese, Rosario (NDP)	Algoma-Manitoulin Trinity-Spadina	
Matthews, Hon. / L'hon. Deborah (LIB)	London North Centre / London-Centre-Nord	Deputy Premier / Vice-première ministre Minister of Health and Long-Term Care / Ministre de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée
Mauro, Bill (LIB) McDonell, Jim (PC) McKenna, Jane (PC)	Thunder Bay-Atikokan Stormont-Dundas-South Glengarry	
McMeekin, Hon. / L'hon. Ted (LIB)	Burlington Ancaster-Dundas-Flamborough-Westdale	
McNaughton, Monte (PC) McNeely, Phil (LIB)	Lambton-Kent-Middlesex Ottawa-Orléans	
Meilleur, Hon. / L'hon. Madeleine (LIB)	Ottawa-Vanier	
Miller, Norm (PC) Miller, Paul (NDP)	Parry Sound-Muskoka Hamilton East-Stoney Creek / Hamilton-Est-Stoney Creek	Minister of Community and Social Services / Ministre des Services sociaux et communautaires
Milligan, Rob E. (PC) Milloy, Hon. / L'hon. John (LIB)	Northumberland-Quinte West Kitchener Centre / Kitchener-Centre	Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services / Ministre de la Sécurité communautaire et des Services correctionnels Minister Responsible for Francophone Affairs / Ministre déléguée aux Affaires francophones
Moridi, Hon. / L'hon. Reza (LIB)	Richmond Hill	Third Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Troisième vice-président du comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Munro, Julia (PC)	York-Simcoe	Second Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Deuxième vice-présidente du comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Murray, Hon. / L'hon. Glen R. (LIB)	Toronto Centre / Toronto-Centre	Minister of Infrastructure / Ministre de l'Infrastructure Minister of Transportation / Ministre des Transports Minister of Labour / Ministre du Travail
Naqvi, Hon. / L'hon. Yasir (LIB) Natyshak, Taras (NDP) Nicholls, Rick (PC) O'Toole, John (PC)	Ottawa Centre / Ottawa-Centre Essex Chatham-Kent-Essex Durham	
Orazio, Hon. / L'hon. David (LIB) Ouellette, Jerry J. (PC) Pettapiece, Randy (PC)	Sault Ste. Marie Oshawa Perth-Wellington	Minister of Natural Resources / Ministre des Richesses naturelles
Piruzza, Hon. / L'hon. Teresa (LIB) Prue, Michael (NDP) Qadri, Shafiq (LIB) Sandals, Hon. / L'hon. Liz (LIB) Sattler, Peggy (NDP) Schein, Jonah (NDP) Scott, Laurie (PC)	Windsor West / Windsor-Ouest Beaches-East York Etobicoke North / Etobicoke-Nord Guelph London West / London-Ouest Davenport Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock York West / York-Ouest	Minister of Children and Youth Services / Ministre des Services à l'enfance et à la jeunesse Minister Responsible for Women's Issues / Ministre délégué à la Condition féminine
Sergio, Hon. / L'hon. Mario (LIB) Shurman, Peter (PC) Singh, Jagmeet (NDP) Smith, Todd (PC) Sousa, Hon. / L'hon. Charles (LIB)	Thornhill Bramalea-Gore-Malton Prince Edward-Hastings Mississauga South / Mississauga-Sud	Minister of Education / Ministre de l'Éducation Minister Responsible for Seniors / Ministre délégué aux Affaires des personnes âgées Minister Without Portfolio / Ministre sans portefeuille
 Tabuns, Peter (NDP) Takhar, Harinder S. (LIB) Taylor, Monique (NDP) Thompson, Lisa M. (PC) Vanthof, John (NDP) Walker, Bill (PC) Wilson, Jim (PC)	Toronto-Danforth Mississauga-Erindale Hamilton Mountain Huron-Bruce Timiskaming-Cochrane Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound Simcoe-Grey	Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet / Président du Conseil de gestion du gouvernement Minister of Finance / Ministre des Finances
 Wong, Soo (LIB) Wynne, Hon. / L'hon. Kathleen O. (LIB)	Scarborough-Agincourt Don Valley West / Don Valley-Ouest	Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire de l'opposition officielle
 Yakabuski, John (PC) Yurek, Jeff (PC) Zimmer, Hon. / L'hon. David (LIB)	Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke Elgin-Middlesex-London Willowdale	Minister of Agriculture and Food / Ministre de l'Agriculture et de l'Alimentation Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs / Ministre des Affaires intergouvernementales Premier / Première ministre Leader, Government / Chef du gouvernement Leader, Liberal Party of Ontario / Chef du Parti libéral de l'Ontario
		Minister of Aboriginal Affairs / Ministre des Affaires autochtones

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Rob Leone, Amrit Mangat
Taras Natyshak, Rick Nicholls
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Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: Soo Wong
Steven Del Duca, Victor Fedeli
Catherine Fife, Kevin Daniel Flynn
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Soo Wong
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Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: Donna H. Cansfield
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Helena Jaczek, Jane McKenna
Paul Miller
Committee Clerk / Greffier: William Short

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